

WILD TANDEMITS

SUPERHERO ROLEPLAYING IN A WORLD GONE MAD



DENNIS DETWILLER • GREG STOLZE • KENNETH HITE • SHANE IVEY
SECOND EDITION



WILD TALENTS

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Introduction

Welcome to *Wild Talents* Second Edition. *Wild Talents* is a roleplaying game that emulates the worlds of comic book superheroes. You make up the characters and their adventures. From the deadliness of *Top 10* and *V for Vendetta* to the four-color action of *Spider-Man*, *JLA*, and *The Avengers*, *Wild Talents* is built to handle it all.

Wild Talents aims to capture the dynamic action of superhero comics. Superhero games should be fast and exciting. The rules should propel the action, not slow it down. They should be flexible enough to handle anything, quickly, without a lot of page-flipping.

Wild Talents does this with a simple, intuitive rules set called the “One-Roll Engine,” or O.R.E. All character actions are resolved with one roll of the dice. In combat you don’t roll to see who goes first, then again to see if you hit, then again to see if your power works, then again to see how much damage you do, then again to see how far you knock

your target across the street, and so on. And you don’t need to spend a lot of time looking up rules and results for every single action.

In *Wild Talents*, you roll once. That tells you all you need to know.

Creating a character in *Wild Talents* is simple and straightforward, and the modular construction of the rules allows you to tweak them to fit the tone of your game, from the deadly to the over-the-top, instantly.

In its standard, unmodified rules, *Wild Talents* strives for a “realistic” feel, to give a sense of consequences for using superhuman powers with abandon—or failing to use them properly when the time is right. But every chapter is loaded with options to “open up” the game to four-color action and beyond.

The result? A different kind of superhero game. A game that plays fast and lets you easily adjust the rules to your style, making anything possible—from lighthearted brawls to take-no-prisoners realism.

Wild Talents is your game.



About Roleplaying

Wild Talents is a tabletop roleplaying game. What does that mean? First off, it's typically played by a small group of people around a table. You might be spread out on sofas, sitting together at a coffee shop, or all logged on to the same chat room, but "tabletop" is how it started and that's the term that stuck.

In a roleplaying game, you and a few friends come up with interesting characters, see what happens to them, and decide how they react. Typically, each player takes the role of one particular character and describes what that character tries to do in the game. I say "tries" because other characters or events might interfere with what you want to do. What makes a roleplaying game dramatic is that sense of conflict, of uncertainty, where the most interesting character you can create gets embroiled in situations and circumstances you couldn't predict.

So what does a game look like? You have several players, usually between three and six. Each player describes what a character says and does in response to what the other characters say and do. Sometimes you just say what your character is doing, and sometimes you actually speak as your character, like in a play. There's no hard and fast rule on when you do one or when you do the other. The point is to be creative and have fun playing "in character." We've tried to capture the heart of it in the example of play on page 34.

Typically one player of the group serves as game moderator, which is sort of a combination of narrator, director, referee and host. The game moderator (GM) doesn't play just one character—he or she plays every character except the player characters. The GM plays everybody that the player characters meet and comes up with interesting situations for them to resolve. You play the game in "sessions," which basically means whatever stretch of time for which you've gotten together to play in an evening. Most gamers like a session to be two to four hours.

A series of interesting situations is usually called an adventure, and a series of related adventures is often called a campaign. Sometimes people play one-shot, stand-alone adventures, and sometimes they play ongoing campaigns where characters grow and change over time. You can read more about playing and running games in this book's appendices.

Since the GM isn't responsible for a single character, his or her job is to be unbiased, to use the rules of the game to determine what happens when the player characters act.

The game rules, of course, are what you're reading now. *Wild Talents* is a game because it has rules that help you create a character who fits in the group's shared setting, and that help you resolve conflicts in that setting in an exciting way. Instead of arguing about who wins or loses, you use the

Author's Note

I'd like to thank all the people who've made *Wild Talents* a success even before it was released—those gamers out there who spent time (and money) on my ideas. The crazed gamers who frequent the Arc Dream mailing lists and discussion board have my undying loyalty. Thanks so much, guys—you know who you are. Particular thanks go to Rob Mansperger for his terrific design work on our Web site.

I'd also like to thank the ever-patient Greg Stolze, the erudite Kenneth Hite, and the brilliant Todd Shearer for all their hard work on this book. If you like what you find here, support them! Check out Ken's weekly column at Indie Press Revolution (www.indiepressrevolution.com). Buy their stuff—I do!

Again, thanks everybody!

Dennis Detwiller

Wild Talents rules and roll some dice. A character with the advantage usually wins, but in chaotic situations like the big battles that superheroes love so much, strange things can happen.

Wild Talents is a superhero roleplaying game, so the player characters are superheroes. But we use that term in its broadest sense—they're characters with superhuman powers. They might not wear spandex; the hardback edition of *Wild Talents* comes with a detailed game setting in which the superhumans, the "Talents," never wear outlandish outfits. And your characters might not be heroes. They might be supervillains. Or they might be ordinary people trying to get by in extraordinary circumstances.

The most important thing is, as a player in a roleplaying game, you decide what your character is like and what your character wants to do. You're not waiting for some other writer to determine your character's fate. You're not waiting for a new add-on to a computer program to let you choose new powers or new directions for your story. You and your friends work together to tell any kind of story you want. That's the unique thrill of tabletop roleplaying.

What You Need to Play

You don't need much to play *Wild Talents* besides this rulebook.

You need lots of ten-sided dice. You can find them at comic book shops or at online stores.

You need scratch paper for writing notes and drawing maps and pictures.

You need characters.

If you're the game moderator (GM), you need whatever notes or maps you have prepared to run the adventure.

Other than that, all you need is imagination.

The New Edition

The first edition of *Wild Talents* appeared in 2006 after literally years of patient waiting by eager fans. The fans were the impetus for *Wild Talents*, after all. It came in response to fan support of our World War II superhero game, *Godlike: Superhero Roleplaying in a World On Fire, 1936–1946*, published originally by Hobgoblynn Press before *Godlike's* creator co-founded Arc Dream Publishing and took over its publication. Fans loved *Godlike's* fast, intense action, and its emphasis on the psychological toll of warfare and heroism, but they wanted to see it in other settings. They came up with *Godlike* games set in ancient Rome, in Vietnam, in ancient England, in worlds of medieval fantasy—and most of all they wanted to see the unique alternate history of *Godlike* extended to the present day. We built *Wild Talents* to make it easy to adapt the rules to any setting and any style of play.

And then we struggled to bring it to print. Arc Dream is a small company. We publish in a niche (gritty, dangerous superhero roleplaying games) of a niche (superhero roleplaying games) of a niche industry (roleplaying games; didn't Tom Hanks make a movie about those once?). We knew from the start that we wanted *Wild Talents* to be a beautiful book, and artists Christopher Shy, Samuel Araya and Todd Shearer produced gorgeous full-color art. But beautiful, full-color books are not cheap.

Finally, we came up with a solution. We'd turn to the fans who demanded *Wild Talents* from the start. We set up a "pledge" drive, where fans could send us their email addresses and say how many copies of *Wild Talents* they'd be willing to pre-order if we had enough to proceed. The goal was to get a few hundred "pledges" in place, and then when it looked like we had enough, we'd invite them to actually place pre-orders, and with that money we'd print a limited edition of 1,000 copies. This being

a niche and all, we figured it would take at least a few weeks to generate the number of pledges we needed to go to press.

It took 36 hours.

We love our players.

A few months later, every one of those 1,000 copies was in the hands of fans. And gamers all over started crying out that they wanted copies, too.

So we started on the new edition. We considered simply reprinting the first edition, but that idea went out the door pretty quickly. First of all, our contracts with the artists limited us to one printing. We'd need to make new deals with them to go to press again. That by itself wasn't a deal breaker; the artists were terrific and we loved to work with them. But we found a lot of things we wanted to do differently in the game. A lot of rules needed to be streamlined and clarified. A lot more information could go into the history of the game world. A lot more sample characters could be added.

Before long, it was clear we weren't looking at an expanded version of the same game, we were looking at a new edition altogether. And if we're already doing a new edition, and we'd need to get new art contracts anyway, let's go ahead and get new art to really make it stand apart, and let's see if we can get it all done by one artist so the book has a truly coherent feel.

So you have *Wild Talents* Second Edition. Its rules have been reworked to better fit the tone we want the game to achieve, and it has all-new illustrations by Todd Shearer, an old friend whose work has made us proud time and again.

If you like *Wild Talents*, you ought to look at the *Wild Talents Essential Edition*, which features the complete rules of *Wild Talents* Second Edition but without the settings chapters. It's paperback, digest-size, black and white, and at only \$10 priced for every game table.

We hope you enjoy *Wild Talents*.

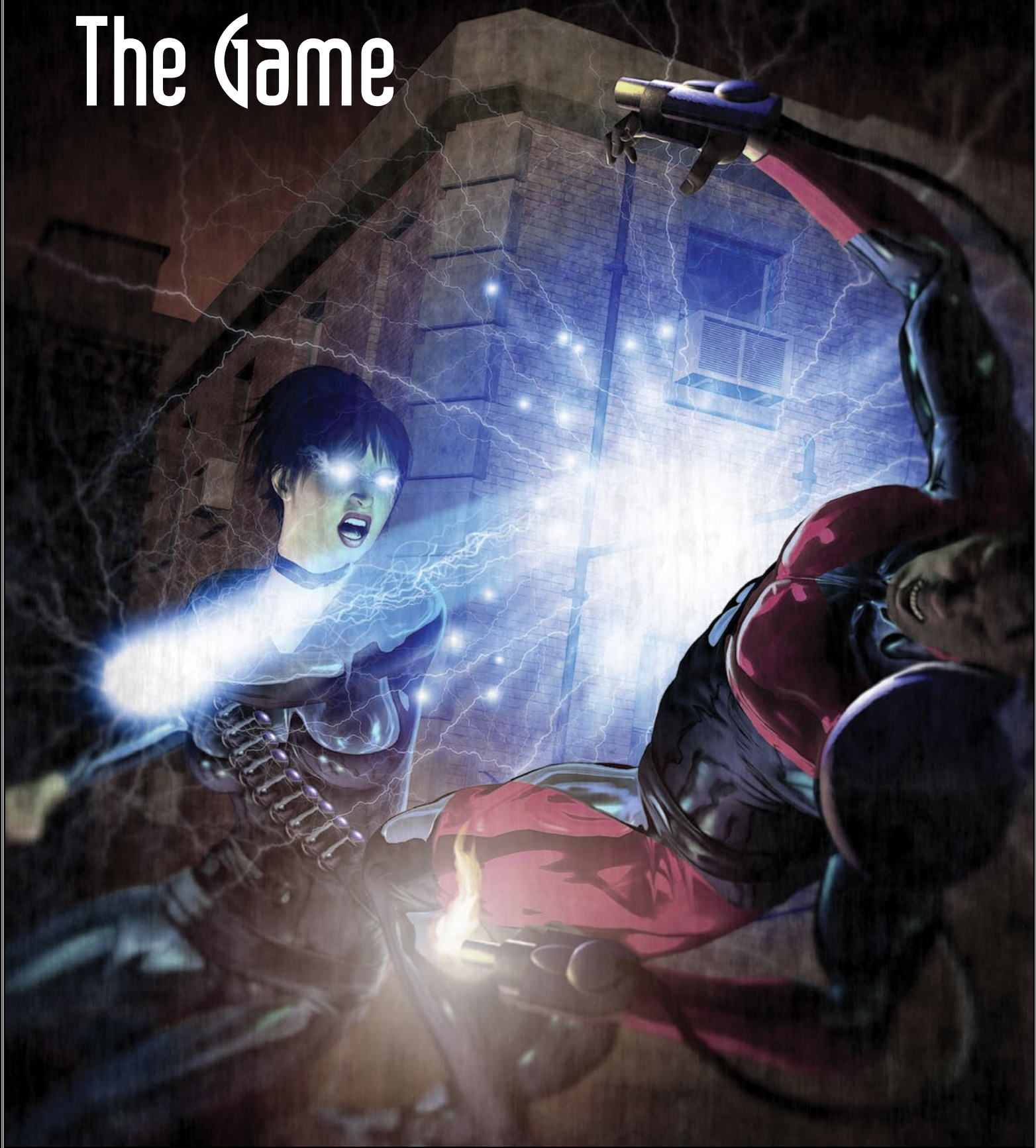
Other Genres

Wild Talents was written with superhero action in mind, but astute players have turned it to every imaginable setting and genre. The first few sourcebooks put *Wild Talents* in Victorian London (*The Kerberos Club*), in the U.S. Civil War (*This Favored Land*), in a modern day where superheroes vie with sinister sorcerers (*Grim War*), in a wrecked dystopia of angry, hopeful ideologues (*eCollapse*), and in a post-Vietnam world that's rocked by the spread of infectious superpowers (*Progenitor*). There have been *Wild Talents* games set in a post-apocalyptic future and in ancient Rome.

The rules lend themselves to any game where the emphasis is on fun action, with compelling consequences for the characters, no matter where or when it's set.

Part 1

The Game



Chapter 1: The One-Roll Engine

The *Wild Talents* rules encourage speed and realism without sacrificing consistency or requiring endless rolls. We call the rules the “One-Roll Engine,” or “O.R.E.” Originally developed for *Godlike*, the O.R.E. keeps game play fast and exciting by extracting all the information you need—speed, level of achievement, hit location, damage; everything you need to know—from a single roll of the dice. *Wild Talents* is also highly modular, allowing the rules and “feel” to be easily altered to suit any style of game play.

What Makes a *Wild Talents* Character?

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of *Wild Talents*, let’s explain the basics—the essential components of every character and the kinds of things they do in the game. This is a basic introduction to the game; we go into greater detail later.

Character Points

Each *Wild Talents* character gets a number of character points (Points) with which to “buy” abilities. The more Points you have, the more things your character can do.

Stats and Skills

Statistics (or Stats for short) describe the basic qualities of every character. They tell you how strong and smart your character is, how coordinated and commanding, how level-headed and how aware.

The Stats are Body, Coordination, Sense, Mind, Charm and Command. They’re measured in dice. In normal humans they range from 1 die to 5 dice (or 1d to 5d in game shorthand). In superhumans,

who can have Hyperstats and Hyperskills, they can go up to 10 dice (10d).

You don’t roll those dice to determine your Stat; instead, that’s the number of dice you roll when you want to use the Stat. So if you have two dice in Mind, whenever you try to out-think someone you roll two dice. However, usually whenever you use a Stat to do something, you’re also using a Skill.

Skills are specific learned abilities such as driving a car or speaking Vietnamese. Like Stats, Skills are measured in dice, from 1 to 5 dice in normal humans, up to 10 dice in superhumans.

Every Skill is based on a Stat—driving a car fast around a corner requires balance and hand-eye coordination, so the Driving Skill is based on the Coordination Stat. To use a Stat and a Skill, roll the dice you get for your Stat and the dice you get for your Skill. If you have 2d in Coordination and 3d in Driving, you roll 5d.

Base Will and Willpower

Most characters, normal and superhuman alike, have a Base Will score that defines their internal resilience, confidence, and drive. It rarely changes.

Most superhumans also have a Willpower score, which drives their incredible powers. Self-confidence is crucial to achievement; tragedy and defeat sap the abilities of the most powerful hero.

Base Will and Willpower aren’t measured in dice like Stats and Skills; they’re measured in points that you spend to do superhuman things. Base Will starts equal to the sum of your Charm and Command Stats, but you can improve it by spending character Points. Willpower starts equal to your Base Will. You can also improve it during play by accomplishing great things.

Motivations and Experience

Each character has two essential motivations: one Passion and one Loyalty. A Passion is some personal, internal desire or belief that the character pursues. A Loyalty is an external motivation, some other character, group or cause that the character serves or defends. Each motivation gets a numerical rating; divide your Base Will score between them. The greater the motivation's score, the more Willpower points you can get in the game by pursuing or defending it—and the more you can lose if you fail to do so.

Your character gets better at doing things by spending Experience Points (XP), which you earn at the end of each game session. Having disadvantages—or, more accurately, playing your character's disadvantages faithfully—allows you to earn more XP.

Powers

A power is some ability that is impossible to ordinary human beings. Flight is a power. Being able to lift a bus with your own hands is a power. Shooting laser beams from your eyes is a power. Being able to teleport across the street is a power.

As you might guess, only superhumans have powers. Of course, some powers are built into objects that anyone can use, even normal humans—but it takes a superhuman to create that kind of object.

In *Wild Talents*, superhumans are sometimes called Talents and their powers are called Talent powers—although occasionally the powers themselves are called Talents, too. We'll try not to confuse you.

We also call powers “Miracles.” That doesn't imply that they have some divine origin (although in your game they might; it's up to you), but to drive home their sheer impossibility. These aren't works of extraordinary skill or adrenaline-fueled feats. They're beyond anything human.

Wild Talents Stats

Stats are the foundation of most character actions in *Wild Talents*.

Body: Strength, endurance and physical resilience.

Coordination: Hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity as well as agility.

Sense: Alertness and perceptiveness.

Mind: Memory and reasoning.

Charm: Charisma and influence.

Command: Innate leadership, strength of personality and the ability to keep a cool head in a crisis.

However, some powers enhance or exaggerate human abilities. A power might simply add dice to your Body Stat to make you superhumanly strong, or it might add dice to your Computer Programming Skill to make you impossibly proficient with computers. Those powers are called Hyperstats and Hyperskills, because they increase Stats and Skills.

If your power doesn't add dice to a Stat or a Skill, it's measured with its own dice, from 1d to 10d. In that case you don't roll them in conjunction with a Stat's dice. You roll the Miracle's dice pool alone.

Dice Pools and Matching Sets

When a *Wild Talents* character tries to do something heroic or just plain difficult, you roll a number of ten-sided dice (“d” for short—so “6d” means six dice) to see if the action succeeds. The dice you roll are called a dice pool. (If you've played *Godlike*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, or *Shadowrun* you're familiar with the concept.)

When you roll, look for matching dice.

Inspirations

While *Wild Talents* is flexible enough to handle any style of superhero gaming with speed and excitement, the standard, unmodified rules tend toward the “cinematically gritty” end of the spectrum.

Our primary inspirations were such comics as *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Top 10*, *The Ultimates*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Watchmen*, and movies such as *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, *Iron Man*, *Spider-Man*, *X-Men* and *The Matrix*.

They're comics and films that combine dizzying action, intense characterization, and enough of a sense of the consequences of it all—the impact of superpowers and the decision to use them on heroes and the people they love—to keep us in suspense. To us, that is the heart of *Wild Talents*.

If you get a set—as in a set of two or more matching dice—your action succeeds. The higher the matching numbers, and the more of them that are the same, the better.

If you roll no matching dice, your action fails.

EXAMPLE: The strange alien hero IAM attempts to hit a supervillain with his katana. The Stat that governs hitting things is Body, and IAM's Body is two ten-sided dice (or 2d). The Skill involved is Melee Weapon (Katana), and IAM's is 4d. Therefore he has six dice, or 6d, in his Melee Weapon (Katana) dice pool. If IAM rolls 1, 2, 2, 5, 6, and 9 with his 6d, he hits the villain; the matching 2s mean a success. But if he rolls 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9, he misses because none of his rolled dice match.

The Cardinal Rules

There are a couple of rules for *Wild Talents* to always keep in mind, no matter how you change the system to suit your particular style. Most rules can be changed or dropped easily; but if you change these cardinal rules, unforeseen problems might crop up. Everything in *Wild Talents* is mutable, but these rules should be dealt with carefully—changing them can seriously affect game play.

Rule #1: Roll only when a task is difficult or the outcome is significant. For all the nifty things you can do with dice rolls in *Wild Talents*, you should roll only when you meet two requirements.

First, roll a dice pool only if the action is difficult enough that a regular person with no training probably couldn't pull it off. If an action is trivially easy, there's no point in rolling it. A game in which every action required a roll—lacing your boots, making coffee, reading the paper—would be tedious. Similarly, if you try something absurd (“I'm going to shoot down the sun!”) there's no point in rolling, because no matter how well you roll it's just not happening.

Second, roll only if the outcome is important to the game. After all, some actions are challenging but irrelevant. Maybe you want to show up one of your fellow players by beating him at a game of chess. You can both roll to see who plays better—but unless something significant is at stake, it's unnecessary.

If you're a player, don't roll unless the GM asks you to. And if he doesn't allow a roll when you think you should get one, mention it, but play along and trust his judgment. After all, only the GM knows what's coming next in the game.

Rule #2: Never roll more than 10 dice. The more dice you roll, the better the chance of success. If you roll only one die, there's no chance of success. But if you roll 11 dice or more, there's no chance of failure. In *Wild Talents* you never roll more than ten dice.

It's entirely possible to have more than 10 dice in a pool. If you have 9 dice in Driving and 5 dice in Coordination, you have a 14d Driving dice pool. If you lose dice for some reason, they come off those 14 dice. But you can't actually roll more than 10.

Of course, sometimes it's important to know how well you succeed, especially compared to other superhumans. For these kinds of actions we use special dice that are reserved for superhumans, called Hard Dice ("hd") and Wiggle Dice ("wd"). Want to be more superhumanly agile than a superhuman with 10d in Coordination? Don't get 20 dice in Coordination—get 10 Wiggle Dice instead.

Remember: Under no circumstances do you roll more than 10 dice.

Rule #3: Round Down! Certain rules in *Wild Talents* require you to divide points or dice pools, sometimes leaving you with less than whole numbers. In this case, always round down. We've seen some nasty in-game fights brew over this simple fact—so now you're forewarned. If a player says, "Well, it doesn't say anything about it in the book!" direct him here:

ALWAYS ROUND DOWN.

Resolving Basic Dice Rolls

If you roll a set, the action succeeds. However, there are different levels of success—some are faster, deadlier, or just plain better than others. Sometimes other people or forces are working against you, to stop your success; so even if you succeed, their success cancels yours out.

In *Wild Talents*, every dice roll has two measures of success—height and width.

Height is the quality of the action. Width is the speed of the action.

Height is the number on the matching dice. If you roll two 5s, the height of the roll is 5. Height is a measure of quality of a success. The higher (or

"taller") the roll, the better the success. A successful action with a height of 10 is more effective than one with a height of 5.

Width is the number of matching dice. If you roll four 6s, the width of the roll is 4. Width is usually speed: The wider the roll, the faster the success. But in combat, width also determines damage. An action of width of 4 happens quicker (and in combat causes more damage) than one of width 3.

The shorthand for these results is written as "width x height." I know it looks like math, but all it means is that a dice roll of width 3 and height 10 is written as 3x10—representing a fast, perfectly executed action.

Note that height (quality) is essentially random, while width (speed or impact) is rarely greater than 2.

What happens if you roll more than one set of matching dice—which one do you use? Whichever you prefer, but not both. Let's say you roll a 3x1 and a 2x10 in the same dice pool. If you're running a race, the 3x1 is a good idea because it's faster (width 3, height 1). If quality is more important, the 2x10 is best (width 2, height 10).

Dice Pools and Power

While height and width tell you how well and how fast your action succeeded, the overall scale of an action—its power, reach, or impact—is determined not by the roll but by the size of the dice pool itself. A 9d energy blast has longer range than one with 4d. A character with 8d in the Miracle Flight goes faster than one with 5d. A speaker with a Persuasion dice pool of 7d can sway more people than one with 3d.

So if you're just comparing power or scope of effect, don't roll; just look at the number of dice in the pool, and the bigger one is faster, more effective or more powerful. (For guidelines on gauging powers see the various Stats' effects starting on page 45 and **Power Capacities** on page 111.)



Loose Dice

Unmatched dice in your dice pool are called “loose dice.” They come in handy in a few circumstances.

Sometimes an action is easy enough that you’re certain to succeed, but you still want to know how well you succeeded. Easy enough. Just look at the highest single die in your dice pool, whether or not it has a match. That’s the height of your roll. If the height beats the Difficulty, your action succeeds. The width is considered 1, if it matters, unless you do roll a match.

Say you’re trying to repair a car engine (in this case, measured in days). But you’re working in your own garage, with all the tools you need and a little time to tinker, so the GM allows a loose roll: Take four days, roll your pool, and use the highest die for the roll’s height.

Botching It

If your roll fails and all your loose dice roll low (5 or under), your performance is particularly sub-standard: You slip and fall, your gun jams, you drop your power hammer on your foot, whatever.

The GM decides whether a botch might apply to your lousy roll, and what the exact result is, based on the circumstances.

Beginner’s Luck

At the GM’s discretion, if your action fails but all your loose dice roll 6 or higher you may get a “beginner’s luck” bonus of some kind even though the action failed—maybe your shot missed but took out a window, showering the targets in glass and distracting them for a round.

Come up with a possible result and suggest it to the GM; if he or she likes it, that’s what happens.

Time: Combat Rounds and Beyond

The width of a roll tells you how long the action takes. Most actions take place in combat rounds. Each round represents a couple of seconds, enough for every character involved in the action to try to do one thing. We talk more about combat rounds later.

Depending on the action, however, the time scale for a task can be measured in combat rounds, minutes, hours, days, or even longer. The GM sets the time scale based on the specifics of the action. Breaking down a door might take rounds, fixing a car, hours, and decoding a complicated communiqué, days. But there are circumstances where they may take longer; it's up to the GM.

Once the time scale is determined, make the roll: Brawling to break down the door, Knowledge (Mechanics) to fix a car, Knowledge (Cryptography) to decode the communiqué.

Subtract the width of the successful roll from 5 to find out how many units of time it takes to complete the task.

If your Brawling roll is 3x7, it takes two rounds to smash down the door ($5 - 3 = 2$).

If you roll a 2x3 on your Knowledge (Mechanics) pool and the time scale is hours, it takes three hours to fix the car: 5 hours minus the width of 2 equals 3.

If your Knowledge (Cryptography) roll is 4x2, it only takes one day ($5 - 4 = 1$) to decode the communiqué.

If an action's time increment is "10 minutes," it takes $(5 - \text{width}) \times 10$ minutes: 50 minutes for a failure, 30 minutes at width 2, 20 minutes at width 3, and so on.

No matter how wide you roll, a task always takes at least one unit of time. If you get a width of five or wider, the job still takes one day, hour, minute, or round.

Time Increments

- Century
- Decade
- Year
- Month
- Week
- Day
- Hour
- 10 Minutes
- Minute
- Round

Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice

Wild Talents uses one die type (the d10) for all rolls. But there are also two special ways of rolling dice: Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice.

Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice are significantly more powerful than regular dice. Use regular dice to resolve regular actions; Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice resolve special actions—most often, the use of powers.

A Hard Die is a special die that is always a 10. You don't roll it; it's automatically 10. If you have two or more Hard Dice in a dice pool, you always succeed (and succeed dramatically) because you always have at least two matching 10s. Like every other die, Hard Dice count towards the ten-die maximum. They're abbreviated "hd," so seven Hard Dice is "7hd".

The downside of Hard Dice is that while they're extremely powerful and effective, they're inflexible. A heat ray using Hard Dice is always as deadly as possible; a super-piloting Skill using Hard Dice always flies as straight and fast as possible. There's no faking it with Hard Dice, no controlling the result. If you attack with a power or Stat that has a significant number of Hard Dice, you kill people.

Hard Dice represent a reflexive, perhaps even unconscious ability; Hard Dice in a pool with normal dice crank up the reliability of the action but reduce flexibility. If you use Hard Dice, you must use all of them.

A Wiggle Die is like a wild card in poker: You assign it any number you want, after you've rolled all the other dice in your pool. This makes Wiggle Dice even better than Hard Dice—any dice pool roll with even a single Wiggle Die succeeds, and if you have two Wiggle Dice you can choose any level of success you like! You can even choose not to succeed or to succeed up to a certain level, if you want—a luxury that Hard Dice don't have.

Like every other die, Wiggle Dice count towards the ten-die maximum. They're abbreviated "wd," so six Wiggle Dice is "6wd".

Wiggle Dice represent a versatile, flexible power.

La Belle Curve

Here's a rough guide to your chances of getting at least one match. As you can see, the benefit of raising a pool from 8d to 10d doesn't even come close to the payoff of raising one from 3d to 5d.

Dice	Odds of One or More Matches
2d	10%
3d	28%
4d	50%
5d	70%
6d	85%
7d	93%
8d	98%
9d	99.6%
10d	99.9%

Difficult Actions

Rolling a set of matching dice is hard enough, but sometimes things are even tougher than that. If your action is more challenging than usual, it incurs a penalty. In *Wild Talents*, there are several kinds of penalties: A difficult action might incur a Difficulty rating, a penalty die, a gobble die, or (rarely) it might require a minimum width.

Difficulty Rating

Particularly challenging actions attempted outside combat often incur Difficulty ratings. A Difficulty rating is a minimum height necessary for a match to be counted as a success. If your match isn't at least as high as the Difficulty rating, you fail.

The GM assigns the minimum height necessary to succeed based on the circumstances. If a door is extremely thick, the GM can decide that a Brawling height of 5 or less is insufficient to break it down. If an aroma is somewhat subtle, he can decide that your Perception roll must have a height of at least 2 or you don't detect it.

Only particularly hard tasks should have Difficulty ratings; requiring a roll at all indicates that even a well-trained person has only a 50% chance.

Difficulty	Rating
Easy	No roll required
Challenging	1 (default)
Difficult	3
Very hard	5
Extremely hard	7
Near impossible	9

Penalty Dice

In other situations that are extremely chaotic and stressful, a particularly difficult action doesn't get a Difficulty rating, it suffers a penalty die. Each penalty die removes one die from your dice pool before you roll. Penalty dice remove Hard Dice first, then normal dice, then Wiggle Dice.

Penalty dice apply most often in combat or when circumstances spiral beyond your control.

Sample Action	Penalty
Multiple actions	-1d
Called shot	-1d
Special maneuver	-1d
Long range	-1d
Melee attack while running	-1d
Ranged attack, moving target	-1d

Gobble Dice

When circumstances are seriously out of control, you suffer a gobble die instead of a penalty die. A gobble die doesn't just remove a die from your dice pool, it removes a die from your highest rolled set. Not only do you have to roll a match, but you have to roll with enough width to keep at least two matching dice despite the gobble die. The odds of that are very low unless you have multiple Hard Dice or at least one Wiggle Die.

A gobble die applies most often in combat when the GM decides your action is almost certainly going to fail, but success is possible if you happen to roll miraculously well or if you have superhuman prowess.

Take a Gobble Die If You . . .

Suffer an injury

Attack beyond long range

Make a ranged attack while running

Minimum Width

Sometimes a task is difficult because you have to accomplish it very, very quickly. After all, blasting a car before it rounds the corner is harder than if it's parked at the curb. Since width indicates speed, the GM can assign a minimum width necessary for a roll to succeed.

Requiring a width greater than 2 substantially reduces the chance of success. A width of 3 is improbable with a normal dice pool, while a width of 4 is nearly unheard of without powers.

Requiring a minimum width of 3 makes a task very, very hard.

Special Maneuvers

When you declare the action you can declare one of these special maneuvers instead of an ordinary action. Attempting one of these moves causes you to lose a die from your dice pool before rolling.

You may attempt more than one special maneuver in the same action, but—unless the maneuver's description says otherwise—you can't use the same special maneuver more than once with a single action.

These maneuvers can apply to any action.

Expert action: Set one die to any value before rolling the rest.

Determined action: Ignore the especially unfortunate effects of a botch (page 22).

Fast action: +1 width for speed purposes only.

Multiple actions: If you roll two sets, you may use each of them with a separate action. You can attempt more than one extra action by giving up additional dice.

Dice Options

These rules apply only if the GM says so!

Alternate Hard Dice

If you dislike the inflexibility of Hard Dice but still want a step between regular dice and Wiggle Dice, at the GM's discretion, it's easy to change the way Hard Dice work. Here are a couple of variants. When constructing a character (see Building a Character, page 38), these dice options cost the same number of Points as regular Hard Dice.

Expert Dice ("ed"): Instead of using Hard Dice that are always 10, you can choose the die's height before you roll. However, no two expert dice can be the same. To score a match with expert dice you must roll the same number with regular, hard, or Wiggle Dice.

Fixed Dice ("fd"): Choose the die's height at character creation; it always "rolls" that number. This is the same as Hard Dice, but you can choose to fix the die at 1, 5, or whatever, rather than 10. Or the GM may decree that all Hard Dice for all characters are some particular number other than 10.

Squishy Dice

If dice are squishy, you can raise a successful roll's height by lowering its width, or vice versa. For example, if you had a squishy 4x4, you can make it 3x5, 2x6, or even 7x1—as long as the total of the width and height are the same. However, a roll can't be squished above a height of 10 or below a width of 2.

You squish the dice immediately after rolling them, and can only squish them once per round. Note that you can only squish regular dice—you cannot squish Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice!

Once you squish a roll, the other dice in the pool are thrown out. You can't squish dice from one set and then add them to another set for one big mega-set. Choose the set and then squish.

Squishy rolls put much more control over the degree and type of success into the hands of the players. For a four-color game, the GM might allow every character to squish rolls at will. For a somewhat realistic game, the GM might only allow squishing by a single step—a 3x3 could become 2x4 or 4x2, but not 5x1—or require a cost of 1 Willpower point per step.

Too Many Tens!

This is a good way to spice up high-powered games that feature loads of Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice. ("Another head shot—another perfect jump—yawn!") In dynamic contests, Hard Dice cancel out Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice cancel out Wiggle Dice. A canceled-out die becomes a regular rolled die. This only applies for dice of the same kind—Wiggle Dice do not cancel out Hard Dice (and vice versa).

For example, say you have a Brawling pool of 6d+4hd and you're fighting a villain with a Brawling dice pool of 7d+2hd+1wd. The pools become 8d+2hd and 9d+1wd, respectively.

Easier Multiple Actions

When attempting multiple actions, roll the higher of the dice pools involved, not the lower pool. If you only score one match, it must be used for the higher dice pool.

Adaptable Dice

If you roll a success, you can spend one point of Willpower to change the height of your match to the number of the highest loose die in your roll.

Multiple Actions

Doing two challenging things at the same time is not easy—but it's possible.

To attempt multiple actions, first declare that you are attempting two (or more) things at once, and calculate the dice pools for the tasks. If you're driving and shooting, for example, the two pools are Driving and Ranged Weapon.

If you are using the same Skill dice pool or Miracle more than once in a combat round, use only that pool. So if you're shooting twice, it's just your Ranged Weapon Skill.

Now roll the smaller of the pools—and take one penalty die from it per extra task. So if you're performing two actions, take one penalty die from the smaller pool and roll. If you attempt three actions at the same time, take two penalty dice from the smallest pool and roll.

Remember: Drop Hard Dice first, then regular dice, and Wiggle Dice last. If you have more than 10 dice in your pool, subtract the dice before rolling.

If you roll more than one set, assign the sets to each action however you like. If you get only one set, choose which task succeeds. If you fail to get any sets at all, both fail.

Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice

If you possess Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice in the pools, you still roll the smaller of the two, even if the Hard or Wiggle Dice are in the smaller pool. However, you can use those dice to make a set only for their particular Stat, Skill or Miracle pool.

If you have 5d+2wd in Driving and 9d in Ranged Weapon, roll the lower pool minus 1d, or 4d+2wd—but the Wiggle Dice can only be assigned to Driving.

If you score an exceptionally wide single set—meaning four or more dice match—you can split that into two (or more) successes.



You can't perform multiple static tasks at the same time if they're on different time scales. If one action takes combat rounds and another takes minutes, don't bother with multiple actions; just do the shorter action first.

EXAMPLE: The strange alien IAM, under attack by a dozen superpowered thugs from the End Gang, is dodging and using one of his alien gadgets to produce a terrifying hallucination at the same time. His Dodge dice pool is 5d and his Projected Hallucination is 4d+1wd. They are the same size, so he opts to roll the 4d+1wd—which drops to 3d+1wd after he loses the dice penalty. He rolls 3, 5, and 7, and sets the Wiggle Die to 7, for a set at 2x7: He has only one set and must use it on the hallucination, since that's the pool with the Wiggle Die. His dodge attempt fails.

Static Rolls, Contests and Opposed Rolls

There are three types of dice pool rolls: static rolls, contests, and opposed rolls.

Static Actions

A static roll is when you're struggling against circumstance or an inanimate object. The situation is static—it isn't actively changing in response to you and trying to make life more difficult. Just roll the dice. If you get a match, you succeed.

In a contest or an opposed roll, you need to succeed against somebody else's roll.

Contests

A contest is when you're competing against another character. Running a race is a classic contest. In a contest, you're rolling against someone else's roll. The widest set finishes first, but the highest set is more effective or efficient. If width is a tie, the highest set goes first.

Which is more important—height or width? That depends on the contest. If it's a foot race, width (speed) matters most. A racer that rolls a 4x2 outruns someone with a 2x10; he might not run with the grace of the guy that rolled a height 10, but he finished first. The winner with a wide but short result might be out of breath and disoriented compared to the loser with a high but narrow roll, but he still came in first.

If time is no object, the victor may simply be the person with the tallest roll. In a chess match—where what matters is the move, not how quickly you choose it—a 2x10 beats a 4x4. The 4x4 player moves more decisively but not as wisely.

EXAMPLE: The vigilante called the Enforcer is trying to outrun Officer "Rabid Anne" Gareth of the NYPD Talent Squad. Gareth rolls her 6d Athletics dice pool and comes up with 2x10. The Enforcer rolls his 10d Athletics dice pool (!) and comes up with 2x9, 2x7 and 2x6. That's a lot of sets, but none is higher than 10. Thanks to her higher roll, Gareth gains ground on the Enforcer.

Opposed Rolls

In an opposed roll, you're trying to actively interfere with another character's action. Use an opposed roll when it's not enough to act first or best, but when you want the other guy to fail and fail *hard*.

An opposed roll is like a contest, but if your width and height are both equal to or greater than your opponent's width and height, each die in your set becomes a gobble die for your opponent. Even better, if your opponent attempted multiple actions, the gobble dice affect each of his or her sets.

EXAMPLE: With Officer Gareth catching up, the Enforcer decides to make things interesting. He attempts multiple Athletics actions, with one action to oppose her roll by knock-

ing a trash can into her path and another roll to make his escape. Gareth simply wants to catch up. Gareth rolls 2x6 and 2x2 and goes with the 2x6; the Enforcer's 9d pool (he lost 1d for multiple actions) rolls 2x8 and 3x3. The Enforcer uses the 2x8 to oppose Gareth's roll. Its width is the same as hers and its height is greater, so the two dice from the Enforcer's 2x8 become gobble dice. One gobbles a die from her 2x6, ruining it. Gareth still has her 2x2 to fall back on—but the Enforcer's other gobble die removes a die from it, too! Gareth is left with no successes at all. She trips over the trash can as the Enforcer dashes away with his 3x3.

Improving the Odds

There are a couple of ways you can improve your chances of success with an action. The most common are taking extra time and cooperating with others.

Taking Your Time

If you take extra time to accomplish a task you can get one or two bonus dice with it. You gain +1d per time unit spent preparing to complete the task. You can gain a maximum of +2d in this manner. For example, if you aim a pistol for two combat rounds, you get +2d to your attack roll.

If you're not under threat of attack and you have some time to think, you can also take time to reduce the Difficulty of a task. Every extra unit of time you spend concentrating on the problem—see **Time**, page 23—reduces the Difficulty by 1.

For example, let's say cracking a code is measured in days, and the code you want to break is Difficulty 4: If you take three days of concentration on the problem and then roll, roll against Difficulty 1. (The time it takes after all that preparation is still 5 – width in days; just add the time spent preparing to the total.)

You can take time to reduce Difficulty and also take time to get bonus dice.

Even better, with the GM's permission, you can take an automatic success in an action without rolling, by taking the maximum amount of time the task requires. This results in a minimal result, equivalent to a width of 1 and a height of 1; but if that's good enough, it succeeds.

For example, if the action normally requires 5 – width hours, and you take five hours to attempt it, with the GM's permission, you automatically succeed with a 1x1.

Damage or anything that incurs a gobble die during this time negates all the benefits of taking your time.

Cooperating on a Task

Two or more characters can cooperate on a task. For a static roll, start with the largest dice pool among the characters involved and add +1d per character assisting, up to a maximum roll of 10 dice.

If it's a contest, it gets a little more complicated. The people working together roll their dice pools separately. If one gets a set, any other character who rolls that number on any die in his or her pool—in a set or on any die at all—can add it to the first guy's set, expanding its width.

If both score sets, use the tallest roll but the lowest width, because the faster guy has to wait for the slower one to catch up.

EXAMPLE: Two goons from the End Gang are trying to hold down the vigilante called the Enforcer. The GM says both sides need to roll Brawling, and the goons' pools are 4d each. The first goon rolls 2, 2, 3, and 5, for 2x2. The second goon rolls 3, 3, 4, and 9, for 2x3. They use the taller roll, 2x3—but since the first goon rolled a “loose” 3 in his pool he can add it to the set for a 3x3.

Extended Contests

Some contests seem like they ought to be more involved than simply a single roll. In that case, play it out as a series of contests and opposed rolls. The goal is to accumulate width from successive rolls, each representing a stage of the action as described by the players and GM.

Race or Chase? The first thing to decide: Are the opponents reaching for a static amount of accumulated width, or does one need to beat the other by by that amount? If they're reaching for a static target, the first one to reach the target wins. That's perfect for a long race to a finish line.

In a chase, one is trying to escape or gain a significant lead and the other is trying to catch up. If the one being pursued accumulates so much more width than the other side, he or she escapes or succeeds and the chase ends. If the pursuer accumulates any more width than the quarry, he or she catches up and the chase ends. The chase might start with the quarry having a lead of a few points of width.

What Width? The thing to decide is the ultimate goal: How much width needs to be accumulated for one side or the other to win and end the extended contest? Since each action is likely to result in a gain of two width for one side or the other, a target of five accumulated width is good for most chases, and 10 accumulated width is good for most races.

Obstacles and Complications: Next, the GM needs to decide if any obstacles are going to stand in the characters' way, and the complications that can ensue if you fail to overcome them.

Each obstacle can apply a Difficulty rating to a character's roll. For dramatic impact we recommend starting with a standard roll—no Difficulty rating—and escalating the Difficulty with each new obstacle, Difficulty 3 for the second obstacle and Difficulty 6 for the third.

If you roll a match but its height is less than the Difficulty, you fail to gain any ground; you accumulate no width. This is also the result if you simply refuse to roll at all this turn, slowing your progress in order to navigate the obstacle carefully. You can try again next turn, when there probably isn't an obstacle.

If you fail the roll outright while facing an obstacle, you fail to accumulate width and also get a complication. Complications range from bad to worse. Perhaps you sideswipe another vehicle so your car takes damage, or maybe you get sand in your eyes and take a penalty die next turn.

If you fail outright when there's an obstacle and your roll is a botch (page 22), the complication is a catastrophe: You collide with an innocent bystander, blow out a tire, smash into a wall, or sprain an ankle so you take a penalty die every turn until the complex contest ends.

As a guideline, add an obstacle no more than every other turn or so, and no more than two or three in any extended contest. Their most important function is not to hold up the characters, but to get the players to come up with more and more creative details to use in the contest.

Contest or Opposition? Once the extended contest begins, the action proceeds in turns. Those can either be the same as combat rounds—an action-packed second or three—or each turn can represent whatever time unit is appropriate.

Each turn, each participant rolls a dice pool for their actions. The dice pool depends entirely on what Skill or power the character is using to get ahead in the extended contest. If it's a foot chase, it's probably Athletics or a power like Unconventional Move. If it's a social contest, it might be Lie, Persuasion, Intimidation, or whatever is most appropriate.

The main thing for each player to decide is whether he or she is rolling to make progress—to

gain width—or to interfere with the other side's roll.

Making progress requires a contest; best roll wins for the moment, but in most circumstances both sides accumulate width for successful rolls.

Interfering requires an opposed roll; if it succeeds, it inflicts gobble dice on the other side.

Multiple actions and special maneuvers are perfectly acceptable, and highly recommended, as long as they fit the characters' actions and the circumstances. With multiple actions, for example, you could attempt one action to oppose your opponent's roll and another one to simply gain ground by accumulating more width for yourself—turning into a very crowded street to lose a pursuer, for instance. Expert actions (setting a die to any value before rolling) can help overcome high Difficulty ratings. Actions that increase width for a specific purpose (a fast action, for example) don't count because they don't affect the overall width of the roll.

Pursuit and persuasion are two classic examples, so we'll show how those work here. The same concepts apply for any extended contest.

Example: Pursuit

In a pursuit, one character is trying to escape from another. The GM must decide how much of a lead the pursued character must gain in order to escape—how much his accumulated width must exceed the pursuer's—and how many obstacles he or she wants to throw in the players' way.

Players oppose each other's rolls by taking reckless risks and deliberately seeking out obstacles—driving at speed on the sidewalk and between stopped cars, hurdling barricades and gaps between buildings, whatever fits the situation.

Here's a sample pursuit, with vehicles in city streets:

Goal: Chase, five width. Likely dice pools: Driving, Perception, any movement power.

Obstacle: Traffic jam. *Difficulty:* none. *Complication:* Damage to vehicle. *Catastrophe:* Severe damage to vehicle.

Obstacle: Pedestrians. *Difficulty:* 3. *Complication:* One penalty die next turn while getting around them. *Catastrophe:* Run into an innocent bystander; damage to bystander and to vehicle.

Obstacle: The bridge is out! Gun it! *Difficulty:* 6. *Complication:* Screech to a halt before plunging into the river; chase ends. *Catastrophe:* Plunge into the river; chase ends.

Example: Persuasion

In an extended social contest, each side attempts to sway the opinion of others by building arguments in debate or gaining influence in conversation and public appearances. The GM must decide how much influence one character must gain to overcome the other. Obstacles are unlikely, unless other parties get involved.

Players oppose each other's rolls with counter-arguments, sly innuendo or embarrassing slander, depending on whether it's a courtroom debate or a series of competing media appearances.

Here's a sample, with each side attempting to tip public opinion before some election or referendum.

Goal: Race, 10 width. Likely dice pools: Lie, Performance, Persuasion, Leadership, any persuasion or manipulation power.

Obstacle: The spoiler: A hopeless but enthusiastic third party enters the debate. *Difficulty:* none. *Complication:* Poorly-timed response proves unpopular; one penalty die next turn. *Catastrophe:* Poorly-timed response loses you substantial support; one penalty die every turn until the contest ends.

Obstacle: Media frenzy. *Difficulty:* 3. *Complication:* Embarrassing public appearance; opponent gets one bonus die next turn. *Catastrophe:* Media trumpets humiliating secrets; opponent gets one bonus die every turn until the contest ends.



Obstacle: Some disaster (“Will they pull Holly from the well in time?”) diverts public attention. *Difficulty:* 6. *Complication:* Waste time regaining headlines; lose 1 accumulated width. *Catastrophe:* Tasteless joke or frustrated comment about the disaster shows up on the Internet; lose 3 accumulated width.

About Combat

When characters in *Wild Talents* fight, it’s resolved in static rolls, contests and opposed rolls, just like other actions. But we go into a lot more detail for the combat rules, because the results can be so drastic. An unlucky social encounter can leave your character embarrassed or a step further from solving the mystery; an unlucky fight can leave your character crippled or dead.

In a fight, width determines how quickly you act and how much damage your attack does; height determines where you hit the enemy. This may seem counter-intuitive—shouldn’t height, or the attack’s quality, determine damage?—but in *Wild Talents*, where you hit is far more important than how hard. A blow to the leg is far less dangerous than the same blow to the head.

Wild Talents tracks two kinds of damage, Shock and Killing. Shock damage can disable your character; Killing damage can permanently maim or kill your character.

See **Chapter 4: Combat** for the complete rules.

Rules Summary

Any important and challenging action in the game is resolved with a roll of 10-sided dice called a dice pool. If you're using a Stat and a Skill, the Stat dice and Skill dice combine to form a dice pool. If you're using a power, the power's dice usually form their own dice pool. No dice pool ever has more than 10 dice.

Most actions are basic actions. If someone is trying to outperform you or stop you, it's a contest or an opposed roll.

Basic Actions

To attempt a challenging action, roll your dice pool. If any dice come up matching, the action succeeds. The more dice that match (called the "width" of the roll), and the higher their face value (called the "height"), the better. A matching set of ones is good, but a matching set of tens is a lot better.

The height of a roll determines the quality of success. A pair of tens is a spectacular success; a pair of ones is marginal.

The width of a roll determines its speed. If you roll three ones, your action goes faster than if you had rolled two ones, or even two tens. A roll's width determines how long the action takes (and sometimes other things, like how much damage is healed when you perform first aid). The wider the roll, the quicker the action. Usually we say an action takes a number of seconds, minutes or combat rounds minus the width of the roll, so it might be "5 – width minutes" or "7 – width rounds."

See page 21.

Contests

When two characters' actions are competing, roll the dice for each and compare their heights and widths. If speed is crucial—the characters are racing, for instance—width is most important. If width is tied, use height as a tiebreaker. If speed is not important, compare height first and use width as a tiebreaker. If both width and height are the same, use the number of dice in the dice pool as a tiebreaker.

If both rolls fail and you still need to know who did better, you have two options. You could simply compare their dice pools. Or you can have the contestants keep rolling until someone wins.

See page 28.

Opposed Rolls

When one character is not just trying to be better than another, but is actively interfering with another character's action—trying to block an attacker's every strike, make an interview subject stumble over his words, or trick a pursuer into following the wrong trail—it's an opposed roll. In an opposed roll, if your width and height are both at least as good as your opponent's, your dice remove or "gobble" dice from his or her sets.

See page 28.

Combat

Combat is resolved in rounds. Each round lasts a few seconds, just long enough for each character to do one thing. An attack roll's width determines the amount of damage (either Shock or Killing) and which attack goes first. Height determines hit location.

See page 59.

Example of Play

This section will give you an idea what a game of *Wild Talents* plays like. If you're new to the game, you might want to read the rules first, then come back here to see how it works.

The player characters in this scene are Henry “Wraith” Francis and “Rabid” Anne Gareth, police officers with the so-called “Talent Squad” in a city with a large population of superhumans. “Rabid Anne” is a normal human with a cool head and powered armor. “Wraith” can turn incorporeal, and while incorporeal he can fly and turn invisible. They’ve been sent on a drunk-and-disorderly call.

Game terms are defined under “Definitions.”

GM: Your skimmer pulls to a stop and hovers high over the address Dispatch gave you. It’s a professional section of town. Mainly skyscrapers and street-level bodegas and sports bars, plus a few older, smaller buildings. There are blue-and-red flashes down on the street. Cop cars.

Wraith: I bring the skimmer down to street level.

Rabid Anne: I radio in that we’re here. Any sign of the disturbance?

GM: Yep. As your skimmer touches down, one of the regular cops waves and points to a bar. A sign with a big neon football is marked “First Round and Ten.” The glass front has been shattered. There’s smoke coming out. It’s dark in there, but you see something big moving around.

Rabid: I activate my armor’s sensors. Can I see inside better?

Wraith: I leave my window open and wraith out through the door, then wave to the cop. “What’s up?”

GM: The cop doesn’t react to your trick. He looks worried. He says, “It’s Doctor Jurassic!”

Wraith: I thought he was a good guy!

GM: You said that in-character? Okay. The cop gives you a look. “No kiddin’. Tell him.”

Definitions

2x10: Read as “two by ten,” a roll in which two of the dice came up 10s: width 2, height 10.

Adventure: A self-contained storyline that usually lasts one to four game sessions. Adventures can be strung together as a campaign.

Base Will: Points measuring a character’s internal fortitude, drive, and resilience.

Bonus Dice: Extra dice you can roll if the circumstances are particularly favorable.

Campaign: An ongoing story usually involving the same group of core characters in the same setting, comprising multiple adventures.

Cinematic: A style of play emphasizing action and danger but allowing for exceptional heroics; think *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Combat Phase: A segment of a combat round. Each round has three phases: declare, roll, and resolve.

Combat Round: A brief span of time in a scene, a few seconds long, in which each character gets at least one action.

Contest: A situation where two characters’ actions compete. The highest set usually wins.

Damage: Harm suffered by a character or object. Measured in Shock and Killing damage (abbreviated S and K).

Declare Phase: The first phase in a combat round, in which all characters announce what they’re trying to do.

Defense: Any action that attempts to prevent an effective attack from succeeding, such as dodging or blocking. Many Miracles can defend.

Dice Pool: The dice that you roll to see if your character’s action succeeds. Dice pools generally are rolled only when an action is especially challenging and the outcome is important to the game. For most other actions, no roll is required—the GM just decides what happens.

Dice pools are determined by adding together a Stat and a Skill, or by looking at a power's dice rating.

Difficulty: The minimum height that a matching roll must be for success.

Extended Contest: A series of contests and opposed rolls that resolve a long conflict; often used for pursuits or tense social encounters.

Four-Color: A style of play that emphasizes over-the-top heroics and dramatic action, as in the JLA and Avengers comics.

GM: The Game Moderator or Game Master, the referee who creates the adventure, the campaign setting, and all non-player characters, and runs the game for the players.

Gobble Dice: Opposed actions such as dodging and blocking are contests rolled against the attack roll. If the opposing roll's height and width beat the opponent's roll, each die in the set removes or "gobbles" one die from the opponent's sets, turning success to failure.

Gritty: A style of play that emphasizes tension, danger, and the consequences of carelessness. *Top 10* and *The Ultimates* are good examples.

Hard Dice: Dice that are never rolled, but are always set to 10. They represent a predictable, inflexible, superhumanly powerful effect; in combat, powers with Hard Dice kill people fast.

Heavy Armor: Thick armor, equivalent to solid steel plating, built to deflect heavy weapons.

Height: The number showing in a set of matching dice. Height indicates the effectiveness of a successful action.

Hit Location: Where a successful attack hits: leg, arm, torso or head. The attack roll's height determines hit location.

Hyperbrain: A nickname for a character with superhuman intelligence.

Hyperstat/Hyperskill: Superhuman ability in a trait that normal humans share, such as unnatural strength or skill.

Wraith: I nod at the cop. Rabid, what's the score?

Rabid: "Please. Call me Anne. Or Officer Gareth." Can I see inside?

GM: Ambient light is bright outside, late afternoon and all, so night vision doesn't do you any good. But zooming in you can see pretty well. The windows are about ten feet tall. Inside, it looks like the lower half of a tyrannosaurus rex staggering drunkenly across the room.

Rabid: Crap. All right. I get out of the car. And flip the safety off my gun. Let's head inside.

Wraith: Right. I fly over to the door and yell out, "Doctor—" What's this guy's real name?

GM: Daniel Tunbridge.

Wraith: "Doctor Tunbridge! This is the police. You need to turn human and calm down!"

GM: Inside, the bar is three stories tall, with balconies surrounding a central open area. Lots of big-screen TVs. All smashed. There are a few people inside—a couple of bartenders cowering behind the main bar, and some people stuck on the balconies. Doctor Jurassic is a full-size, real-life T-rex. He turns, suddenly looks not at all wobbly, and roars. **LOUD.**

First combat round. Declare your actions. Wraith, you have the lowest Sense Stat, so you declare first. Then Anne. Then Jurassic.

Wraith: Ah, nuts. I'm defending with my "insubstantial" power. It's a Useful Power Quality.

Rabid: If there's enough of a wall under the broken window, I'll hunker behind it. Otherwise I'm dodging if he comes at us.

GM: There's no wall, just broken glass. He's not charging at you, but his roar is bad enough—roll 'em!

Wraith: Looks like 10, 8, 5 and 3, and I'll set my Wiggle Die at 10. So I'm defending at 2x10. Width 2, height 10.

Rabid: . . . No matches. Damn.

GM: Doc Jurassic's roar is 2x10, and it affects both of you. Wraith, your defense is in a contest with his roar, and your 2x10 matches his roll for both width and height. That means you gobble up his attack dice and make it miss—you go all-the-way insubstantial for a moment and the sound waves go right through.

Anne, your dodge wouldn't have worked anyway. Take 2 Shock damage to the head, no armor. You see the bystanders in the bar and the cops outside scream and cover their ears in the sudden, horrifying noise.

Rabid: My armor gives me immunity to flashes and loud noises and things with two Hard Dice.

GM: Oh. Well, that'll work. No damage for you, either. It's the next round. Time to declare.

Rabid: Good! All right. Let's see if we can find out what his problem is. I shoot him with my stun beam.

Wraith: Look at you. Always with the shooting! I'm flying in to rescue some people.

GM: Okay. Jurassic lumbers forward to stomp on Anne. Roll.

Rabid: Holy. . . Dice gods, be good to me.

Wraith: Um . . . I'm not doing anything fancy with the "insubstantial" power since I haven't yet gotten to the dino-bait—I mean bystanders. Do I need to take a multiple actions penalty to use it and flight at the same time?

GM: No. Just roll for flight.

Wraith: Okay. I rolled 9, 9, 6, 4, and 2, and set the Wiggle Die to 9, for 3x9. Width 3, height 9. Fast and elegant. That's me all over.

Rabid: My stun beam comes up—3x10! But my armor keeps me to width 2 for initiative, so I go at 2x10. That sounded like a lot of dice you were rolling there, GM. . .

GM: Yep. Jurassic's stomp comes up 2x10. Okay. That's a tie for initiative, so I'll say your shot goes off just as Jurassic is looming over you. What kind of damage does it do?

In Character (IC): Something a player says that his or her character is saying.

Initiative: A number that determines what order in which characters act in a combat round. Determined by a roll's width.

Killing Damage: Damage that is dangerous and likely to be lethal if not treated, such as a gunshot wound, a puncture wound or a broken bone. Five Killing from a single attack is usually enough to maim or kill an ordinary person.

Light Armor: Personal armor that reduces damage from hand weapons and gunshots.

Loose Dice: Rolled dice that have no matches.

Miracle: A superhuman power.

Multiple Actions: An attempt to do two challenging things at the same time. If you're doing one thing that's challenging and another that's mundane, there's no need to treat it as multiple actions because you don't have to roll the mundane action at all.

NPC: Non-player character. A character created and portrayed by the GM.

Opposed Roll: An action that uses gobble dice to interfere with another action.

Out of Character (OOC): Something the player says that the character in the game is not saying. ("My dice suck! Pass the chips.")

Power Quality: One of the three elements that make up each power: Attacks, Defends, or Useful. Many powers have multiple Qualities.

PC: Player character. A character in the game who is controlled by one of the players.

Penalty Dice: Dice that you must remove from your dice pool before rolling. Remove Hard Dice first, then normal dice, then Wiggle Dice.

Player: Any player who's not the GM.

Regular Dice: Ten-sided dice rolled to resolve difficult actions.

Resolve Phase: The last phase in a combat round, in which all the action happens based on what the characters declared and rolled earlier.

Roll: A throw of the dice, usually required because a character is attempting something difficult. If two or more dice match, it succeeds.

Roll Phase: The second phase in a combat round, in which each character rolls one dice pool based on the actions announced in the declare phase.

Set: A group of matching dice.

"Shaking It Off": A rule where a character spends Willpower to reduce damage from an injury (page 53).

Shock Damage: Surface trauma, such as shallow cuts, bruises, or light bleeding. Shock damage is usually not fatal.

Skill: An area of specialized training. To use a Skill, roll Stat dice and Skill dice.

Trauma Check: A roll of the Command Stat plus the Stability Skill, required when facing mental trauma such as mortal fear or committing terrible violence. (A character without Stability can roll only the Command Stat.)

Stat: A character's native Body (strength), Coordination (speed and agility), Sense (perceptiveness), Mind (intelligence and memory), Charm (influence and charisma), or Command (strength of personality and coolness under fire). Every Skill is based on one of the Stats.

Width: The number of matching dice in a successful roll. Width usually indicates the speed of an action or the amount of damage an attack inflicts.

Willpower: A character's internal fortitude, drive, and resilience. Willpower starts equal to Base Will but changes often. In most games, Willpower fuels superhuman powers; characters who lose faith in themselves lose what drives them to superheroics.

Wiggle Dice: Dice that can be set to any number after the other dice are rolled, thus guaranteeing a success.

Rabid: Six Shock to the head.

GM: No Penetration? It doesn't look like he even feels it. Then the very large, very heavy foot comes down. Hard. And squashes you flat into the cement. Take 6 Shock and 6 Killing to every single hit location, with Penetration 4. That knocks four points off your Heavy Armor Rating AND your Light Armor Rating.

Rabid: Good Lord! Uh . . . OK. Glad I have both. The Penetration means it punches right through my Heavy Armor, but my Light Armor Rating is hardened. So my Light Armor reduces all the Shock to 1 and turns 4 Killing to Shock. That leaves 5 Shock and 2 Killing. Yikes. How about I spend 5 Willpower to buy the Shock from my head with the Shaking It Off rules?

GM: Sounds good. You take two Killing to your head. With all that Killing damage you've got broken bones and internal injuries everywhere, but you're alive and just barely conscious. I think it's time for a Trauma Check on your next action. If you blow it, you're going to freak out. That would be even more bad news.

Wraith, you hear the stomp—THOOM!—and turn in time to see Jurassic lift his foot off Rabid's crushed body.

Declarations?

Wraith: Uh. . . .

Chapter 2: Building a Character

Building a character is a cooperative process between GM and player.

First the GM sets a Point Total, which determines how many Points you have to spend on your character's Stats, Skills, and powers.

Stats, or statistics, are broad descriptions such as Body (physical strength and endurance) and Mind (intelligence and memory).

Skills are more specific areas of training that add to your Stat abilities: The Brawling Skill adds to Body when fighting; the Tactics Skill adds to Mind when deciding the best way to spring an ambush.

The next step is deciding the basic concept for your character's superhuman powers (if any)—the Archetype. An Archetype defines what kinds of powers your character can have (and in some cases it tells you powers you are required to have). Do you want an alien bruiser? A psychic? A gadgeteer? Something else? Discuss the concept with the GM as you brainstorm—the game world may

have built-in limitations on the type of character you can play. It might have no magic, for instance, only powers fueled by alien science; or it may have magic but only modern, real-world technology.

Powers are just what they sound like—superhuman abilities such as super-strength and the ability to fly.

Base Will and Willpower: Finish by calculating your Base Will and current Willpower score, and your character is ready to play!

The Check List

Before we get into the details, let's take a look at character creation, step by step.

Step 1: The Point Total

The GM decides on a general power level of the game before the players sit down to create characters. The first step is setting a Point Total.



The Point Total indicates how many Points you have to construct your character and gives an idea of the game's power level. For example, a 500-Point character is just generally better than a 300-Point character. But more Points don't always mean one character is better than another at everything: The 300-Point character might be a warrior king while the 500-Point character could be a pacifist monk.

During character creation, Points are just Points—an abstract shorthand used to calculate the cost and relative value of a character. Only when they are spent on Stats, Skills, Hyperstats, Hyperskills, powers, Base Will or Willpower do Points become something.

Once the Point Total is set, and a briefing on the basics of the game world is given, it's time to sit down and build your character.

See **The Point Total** on page 41 for details.

Step 2: Stats

Characters have six Stats: three governing physical actions (Body, Coordination, Sense) and three governing mental and social actions (Mind, Charm and Command). The vast majority of characters have all six Stats. Normal human Stats range from 1d to 5d, and are always regular dice. Characters with some Archetypes can have Stats with more than five dice, or with Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice.

Stats are explained in detail on page 43.

Step 3: Skills

Skills are Stat-based abilities learned through practice or instruction, such as the ability to program a computer (based on the Mind Stat), give an inspiring speech (based on Command), or perform a powerful spin-kick (based on Body). Pick and choose from the Skills list on page 48. If you can't find a Skill that fits, create your own.

Normal humans Skills range from 1d to 5d. As with Stats, some Archetypes allow you to have

more than five Skill dice, or Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice with Skills.

Skills are explained beginning on page 47.

Step 4: The Archetype

Archetypes are game shorthand for characters' origins and intrinsic abilities. Is your character an alien? An android? A mutant? In game terms, that's an Archetype: a set of Meta-Qualities that allow your character to do certain things and possess certain powers or other odd abilities. For a flat Point cost of its own, the Archetype gives you the capacity to buy those powers.

We've included the basic Archetypes that make up the vast majority of superheroes. The Super-Normal, the Alien, the Mystic—sometimes a comic book character is a combination of two or even

Hyperstats and Hyperskills

Hyperstats and Hyperskills are the product of superhuman powers. They're slightly less expensive than normal, natural Skills and Stats. If you have 2d in Body as your native, natural Stat, plus 8d in Body as a Hyperstat, you have a completely average physique (the natural 2d) but you can lift a dozen tons! If you ever lose access to your powers, however, you have average strength and have only your natural 2d in Body.

Hyperstats Cost Per Die

Regular die	4 Points
Hard Die	8 Points
Wiggle Die	16 Points

Hyperskills Cost per Die

Regular die	1 Point
Hard Die	2 Points
Wiggle Die	4 Points

Cost Per Die

The Point cost per die doubles as you move from regular dice to Hard Dice to Wiggle Dice. A regular die is always half the cost of a Hard Die in the same power, which in turn is half the cost of a Wiggle Die. This makes things simple when building characters: If you know the cost for any die type in a Stat, Skill or power, you can easily calculate any other.

For example, if a Wiggle Die in a power costs 32 Points, you know a Hard Die in the same power costs 16 Points and a regular die costs 8.

three Archetypes combined. Want to be an alien? Spend Points for the Alien Archetype and go to town—your character's an alien and you gain the abilities listed for the Alien Archetype. But if none of the Archetypes catch your eye, it's easy to build one from scratch.

For pre-made Archetypes and instructions on creating your own, see **Chapter 5: Archetypes**.

Step 5: Powers

There are three types of powers: Hyperstats, Hyperskills, and Miracles. For ease of use, from here on out we refer to them all as powers. But it's important you understand the distinction first. Under the hood, they're mostly the same but in fundamental concept they're worlds apart.

The difference between Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Miracles is simple: Hyperstats and Hyperskills are normal Stats and Skills, such as the Mind Stat or the Firearms Skill, exaggerated to superhuman levels. Hyperstats and Hyperskills add extra dice to ordinary Stats or Skills.

Then there are Miracles. The distinction between ordinary Stats or Skills and Hyperstats or Hyperskills is a difference of degree; anyone can lift some

weight; someone with a Hyperstat in Body can just lift a lot of it. No ordinary person can turn invisible, change metal into ice, or teleport. Those are Miracles. Miracles are different kinds of abilities entirely.

Most Miracles are measured in dice pools. When you activate it, roll the dice pool to see how well it works.

Sometimes powers aren't even part of your character, but are embedded in an item like a ray gun, magic sword, or flying carpet. These are external powers, or foci (singular: focus). External powers are often cheaper to build than internal ones, because they can usually be stolen or destroyed.

Also, sometimes a Hyperstat, Hyperskill or Miracle is more or less effective than usual. Maybe your Harm Miracle does more damage than usual, or your Flight goes faster; or maybe your Hyperbody (that's Body with Hyperstat dice) can't lift things made of tin, or your Archery Hyperskill only allows you to shoot at night. You can make any power more effective by buying Extras that increase its cost, or less effective with Flaws that reduce its cost.

Hyperstats and Hyperskills always have the same base cost. But because Miracles are so varied, they can have very different costs.

Rules for creating custom or "gourmet" Miracles are on page 104. A list of ready-to-play "cafeteria-style" Miracles begins on page 140.

Extras, Flaws, and foci are discussed beginning on page 121.

Step 6: Base Will and Willpower

Almost all characters have a Base Will score equal to their Charm and Command Stats added together. This number reflects a character's normal, baseline confidence level. It rarely changes.

Willpower is a derivative of Base Will found only in superhuman characters. It changes fre-

quently. If your Willpower is low, your powers may fail you when you need them most. For more on Willpower and Base Will, see page 51.

During character creation, extra Base Will points cost 3 Points each. Whatever Points are left over after building your character are added directly to your current Willpower score.

Will Type	Cost per Point
Base Will	3
Willpower	1

The Point Total

The Point Total tells how many Points your character should be built with; it represents a general measure of the character's raw power. Even in the most brutal and deadly game, a character built on 1,000 Points is going to be a powerhouse compared to one built on 100 Points. Usually all players in a game get the same Point Total.

Several factors must be considered to determine the proper Point Total for a game.

The "Flavor" of a Game

Every roleplaying campaign has a basic feel or tone to the game play—a flavor. Choosing a flavor is the first step to determining a Point Total.

Is it hyper-realistic and deadly? Is it cinematic and swashbuckling? Is it four-color and over-the-top? A game's flavor communicates many things to the players and GM, and defining the flavor early on is a good way to help players construct the right kind of characters for the game.

The following three flavors represent good markers along the spectrum, ranging from the danger of the real world all the way to the unbounded action of four-color comics and superhero cartoons.

Gritty: Gritty is the flavor of the real world—just add powers. There are no larger-than-life heroes, only people trying to make a difference. It's more con-

cerned with morality and the implications of power than straight-up super powered slugfests. This is the flavor of *GODLIKE*, *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Characters in a gritty game have powers but still face real-world dangers and responsibilities. A bullet to the head is just as deadly to heroes as to a normal Joe, and the rent is no easier to cover because you were out stopping a nuclear attack instead of showing up for your shift at Pizza Shack. If players are interested in exploring what life might really be like with powers, this flavor is perfect.

In most gritty campaigns, characters are built on relatively few Points.

Cinematic: Cinematic is the flavor of the movies and many comics. It emphasizes heroic action, dramatic conflict resolution, and doing the right thing. In this kind of game the characters are somewhat immune to the misfortunes of the regular world and things generally go their way unless it's important to the story that they do not. This is the flavor of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Wars*.

Characters in a cinematic game have powers, but that doesn't completely divorce them from danger. They're more than a match for a normal Joe, but against other supers things quickly even out. As in the movies, characters in a cinematic game can die if they really screw up, or (more likely) if it's dramatic and important to the story.

This flavor is good for players who are not sure which extreme they want—gritty or four-color.

Four-Color: Four-Color is the flavor of the standard comic book, where characters are larger than life. When they fail, they fail dramatically, but in the end the bad guys are punished, the good guys win and everything works out. This is the world of the Justice League, Superman and the Avengers. It's concerned with vivid characters and spectacular action.

Characters in a four-color game have powers (and how!) and are able to effect nearly any change in the short term. They may be in danger of being

knocked out, captured, or beaten up, but they are not usually in direct danger of death. Of course, from time to time even the most central four-color character dies—but such deaths rarely last!

This flavor is good for players who enjoy over-the-top action and world-spanning (sometimes universe-spanning) adventures. Anything (and often everything) can happen in a four-color game, and characters are usually built on a high Point Total.

Character Power Levels

After the GM picks a flavor, setting a Point Total becomes a little easier. In general, gritty games have lower Point Totals than four-color games. The following Point Totals are examples only, and the GM may change them as needed. For beginning GMs, we recommend starting your players at 250 Points.

Power Level	Point Total
Normal human	40 to 100
Exceptional human	100 to 200
Powerful superhuman	200 to 500
Earth-shaking entity	500 to 750
Galactic entity	750 to 1,000
Universal entity	1,000 to 2,000

Setting the Ground Rules

It's usually a smart idea to not just give each player one big pool of Points to spend, but to specify how many Points can be spent on Stats, how many can be spent on Skills, and how many can be spent on powers.

If your game is meant to be a low-powered campaign that emphasizes the contrast between normals and superhumans, you want character Stats to be pretty close to human standards. That means you need to allow a limited number of Points to be spent on Stats and Skills, with more Points spent on powers.

If it's an over-the-top game where the player characters are often the pinnacle of human achievement even *before* they get powers, allow the players to go nuts with their Stats and Skills.

Briefing the Players

After establishing a clear picture of the flavor and Point Total of the game, the GM should prepare a short briefing for the players. Generally the more comprehensive the description, the clearer the indication of what's expected of the players. This is a good thing. It helps the players construct characters that seem to “fit” in the game world much more effectively.

Here's a simple example: “A 250-Point game in a gritty world where mutants are hunted by the government.” Short and concise, it leaves room for creativity but also gives a clear indication of mood.

Or if you prefer more detail: “A 500-Point game in a four-color world where the characters are members of the solar system-wide Earth Defense League.”

The briefing might include a list of powers and rules that the GM doesn't want in the game, as well as what dice options are permitted. The campaign worksheet at the back of the book can help keep track of what is permitted in a particular game.

Chapter 3: Stats and Skills

The essential building blocks of every *Wild Talents* character, human or superhuman, are Stats and Skills. They define your character's natural abilities and the things you've learned to do, and are the basis of most dice rolls—the Stat + Skill dice pool.

Stats

Six statistics (Stats for short) measure your in-born physical and mental capabilities. Three Stats govern physical capabilities (Body, Coordination and Sense), and three govern mental capabilities (Mind, Charm and Command).

Normal humans have Stats between 1d and 5d. A Stat of 1d is dismal, human average is 2d, 3d and 4d are exceptional, and 5d is the human maximum. Ordinary humans have only regular dice with Stats, not Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice.

Some character Archetypes allow you to have more than 5d in a Stat, or to have Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice in Stats.

Hyperstat dice are Stat dice that stem from some power, rather than your own native human (or alien, or robot, or whatever) ability. Some Archetypes allow you to have Hyperstat dice that bring your Stat to greater than the normal maximum of 5d, or to have Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice with your Hyperstat dice.

Sometimes we use Hyper(Stat name) as shorthand for Hyperstats—Hyperbody for a Body Hyperstat, Hypermind for a Mind Hyperstat, and so on.

Physical Stat: Body

Hand-to-hand combat is governed by the Body Stat, which measures sheer physical power and the ability to use it. With high Body you can lift more,



hit harder and run faster than someone with low Body.

See *Body Effects*, page 45, for your character's lifting capacity, throwing capacity, base damage, sprinting speed, and jumping distance.

Lift is the maximum weight you can lift and carry. At maximum lift you can walk only 2 yards per round. At 1/2 maximum lift you can run at 1/4 your maximum sprint speed; at 1/4 maximum lift you can run at 1/2 your maximum sprint speed.

Throw is the maximum weight you can throw 10 yards. For lighter objects, move down the chart—for every extra Body die, you can throw it an extra 10 yards. So if you have Body at 9d, you can throw a 200-pound superhero 40 yards. Ouch.

Base Damage indicates the base damage of your hand-to-hand attacks. See *Damage*, page 60, for details. When wielding a weapon in hand-to-hand combat add +1 Killing damage for Body 6d to 7d, or +1 Shock and +1 Killing for Body 8d to 10d—but don't be surprised if the GM rules that the weapon breaks after the first couple of swings.

Sprint is the maximum distance you can sprint in one combat round. You can maintain this speed for your Body Stat in combat rounds without rolling. After that, with a successful Athletics or Endurance roll you can keep it up for width in rounds.

You can jog at half this speed without a roll; how long you can keep it up is up to the GM.

Jump is your maximum running jump with an Athletics roll. Without a roll (or with a failed roll) you can leap half this distance. Halve all distances if you jump without running first.

Adding Extras to Body

With power modifiers called Extras, such as *Booster* (page 124) and *No Upward Limit* (page 127), superhumans can lift much more than the base maximum. Each instance of *Booster* or *No Upward Limit* increases Body Stat effects.

You can also add levels of the *Attacks Power Quality* (page 106) to Body to increase your unarmed and melee weapon damage.

Movement

You can figure out your maximum speed by looking at your Body Stat or the appropriate movement Miracle (see *Body Effects* on page 45 and *Power Capacities* on page 109). One yard per round is equivalent to one mile per hour.

You can move that distance in one combat round without having to roll; roll only if you're trying to beat someone else or to keep up that speed across difficult terrain. If you don't have to roll, you can move at that speed and attack at the same time without declaring multiple actions (see *Multiple Actions* on page 27).

But we recommend you keep movement abstract. There's usually no need to crunch numbers. If in doubt, just roll Athletics or a movement power and compare widths.

Physical Stat: Coordination

Coordination measures hand-eye coordination, reflexes and how well you control and maneuver your body.

Physical Stat: Sense

The Sense Stat indicates how observant you are. With a high Sense Stat you have keen hearing, clear vision, and a better-than-average shot at noticing that funny burnt-almond odor before eating the poisoned date. With a low Sense you are nearsighted, hard of hearing, or generally oblivious to your surroundings.

Mental Stat: Mind

The Mind Stat measures your natural intellect. With a high Mind Stat you have a better memory, quicker math skills, and a better grasp of abstract concepts than someone with a low Mind Stat.

Body Effects

Effects are not cumulative for Body; they are cumulative for all other Stats.

Dice	Lift	Throw 10 Yds.	Base Damage	Sprint	Jump (Length/Height)
1d	50 lbs	6.2 lbs	Shock	8 yards (8 mph)	2 yards / 0.5 yards
2d	100 lbs	12.5 lbs	Shock	10 yards	3 yards / 1 yard
3d	200 lbs	25 lbs	Shock	12 yards	4 yards / 1 yard
4d	400 lbs	50 lbs	Shock	15 yards	5 yards / 1 yard
5d	800 lbs	100 lbs	Shock	20 yards	6 yards / 1.5 yards
6d	1,600 lbs	200 lbs	Killing	25 yards	8 yards / 2 yards
7d	1.6 tons	400 lbs	Killing	30 yards	10 yards / 2.5 yards
8d	3.2 tons	800 lbs	Shock and Killing	40 yards	12 yards / 3 yards
9d	6.4 tons	1,600 lbs	Shock and Killing	50 yards	15 yards / 4 yards
10d	12.8 tons	1.6 tons	Shock and Killing	60 yards	20 yards / 5 yards

Body Extra	Lift	Throw	Damage	Sprint Speed	Jump
Booster	x10	x10 weight or +25 yards	No effect	x2	x2
No Upward Limit*	x2	x2 weight or +10 yards	No effect	x1.25	x1.25

* For doublings beyond Body 10d. Use the Body Effects table for increases up to the equivalent of Body 10d.

Coordination Effects

Dice	Notes
1d	You can cross a room safely if there's nothing in the way.
2d	You play a decent game of darts.
3d	You're a great juggler.
4d	You're nimble as an aikido master.
5d	You're agile as an Olympic gymnast.
6d	You can attempt to dodge or block any attack, even gunshots.
7d	You can move so fast, you're a blur.
8d	You can catch fast objects such as arrows in flight without rolling—if they're not aimed at you.
9d	You can literally move faster than people can see.
10d	Every external muscle in your body is under your conscious control.

Sense Effects

Dice	Notes
1d	You notice when someone's talking to you—sometimes.
2d	Loud noises wake you up.
3d	You're unusually sharp-eyed.
4d	You're an uncanny tracker.
5d	You are one with your environment.
6d	You can use your senses to compensate for each other; you can use minute sounds, the touch of air pressure, smells and taste to search a pitch-black room.
7d	With a successful roll, you can sense movement up to a quarter mile away.
8d	You can differentiate between dozens of sounds amidst a cacophony.
9d	You can see in the dark, read by touch, and identify targets by smell.
10d	It takes a Miracle (literally) to sneak up on you.

Mind Effects

Dice Notes

1d	When people call you an intellectual, you can't always tell they're joking.
2d	You can get high grades with a lot of work.
3d	You're notably bright and learning comes easily.
4d	You can have your pick of Ivy-league scholarships.
5d	You have a photographic memory (sight only) with a successful roll.
6d	You have a photographic memory (all senses) with a successful roll. If you need a clue based on something you experienced at any time in the past, it's yours.
7d	Einstein and Hawking seem somewhat childish to you.
8d	All modern theory is the equivalent of a monkey banging two stones together.
9d	You can recall with perfect clarity anything you previously sensed without rolling.
10d	You can consider intellectual problems even while asleep.

Charm Effects

Dice Notes

1d	You're a wallflower.
2d	You get along with most people.
3d	You often defuse tense situations.
4d	Any time there's a social function, you're invited.
5d	Your élan is legendary, and others struggle to win your favor.
6d	With a successful roll you can make someone want to do something otherwise completely unpalatable.
7d	You can convince anyone of anything after 5—width days of persuasion.
8d	You can convince anyone of anything in 5—width hours of persuasion.
9d	You can convince anyone of anything in 5—width minutes of persuasion.
10d	You can convince anyone of anything in 5—width rounds of persuasion.

Command Effects

Dice Notes

1d	You are easily startled.
2d	You're a regular Joe or Jane.
3d	You're charismatic and graceful under pressure.
4d	You're a born leader and seemingly immune to stress.
5d	Your presence commands attention and respect.
6d	You don't suffer the usual penalty die from injury or distraction.
7d	You can use the Command Stat instead of Body with the Endurance Skill.
8d	You are completely immune to pain and discomfort.
9d	All your feelings and autonomic physical responses (breathing, heartbeat) are under your conscious control without a roll. You never need to make Trauma Checks.
10d	On a successful roll, you can bark an order in a voice that causes a person to obey before considering the consequences, as long as it takes no more than a single round.

Resisting Charm and Command

If you have Charm or Command of 6d or more, it's pretty easy to get unimportant NPCs to do your bidding—with enough time to work on them, a successful roll convinces them to do or believe nearly anything. Against an important character, however, you must beat the target's Stability Skill in a contest. Even if they fail, PCs and certain NPCs can expend Willpower and Base Will to resist Hypercommand (see **Secondary Score: Base Will**, page 51).

Mental Stat: Charm

The Charm Stat measures charisma, influence and diplomacy. Beauty is often a part of high Charm, but not always; there are plenty of people who are physically unimpressive but terrifically charming. With high Charm you easily draw attention, dominate conversations, sway opinions, and persuade others to see things your way.

Mental Stat: Command

The Command Stat measures your force of personality, your capacity for leadership, and your composure in the face of crisis. With high Command you remain uncracked under great pressure and people instinctively listen to you in a crisis.

Skills

While Stats measure innate ability, Skills represent training and practice at specific tasks or subjects. You may have a great deal of innate Coordination, but you won't drive very well without knowing the basics of how cars work. In some endeavors, pure talent only takes you so far.

Skills range from no dice (no training at all) to 5d (world-class mastery)—the average Skill, 2d, represents typical training and experience for someone who uses that Skill often. Any Skill with more than 5d, or with hard or Wiggle Dice, is a Hyperskill. Only superhumans have Hyperskills.

Every Skill is governed by a Stat. Brawl is a Body Skill, while Ranged Weapon (Pistol) is a Coordination Skill. Add the Stat and Skill together to get your total dice pool.

If your Stat + Skill exceeds 10d, you only roll 10d, but those excess dice remove dice pool penalties—such as range or multiple action penalties. For example, if you have a Coordination + Ranged Weapon (Pistol) dice pool of 12d, those two excess dice above the 10d maximum remove the 2d penalty for attempting three actions at once. This is a significant advantage for large Skill dice pools.

Some Skills are more specialized than others, applying only to a particular type of action. If you have dice in the Ranged Weapon (Type) Skill, choose what type of weapon you are skilled in: pistols, rifles, shotguns, or whatever.

A basic list of useful Skills is available below, but don't feel limited to those. Nearly anything that takes time and effort to learn—a language, a trade, any useful body of information—can be a Skill. Different settings may have very different Skills!

New Skills should be fairly specialized and restricted in application; use the basic Skills as examples.

Same Skill, Different Stat

At the GM's discretion, some uses of a Skill might involve another Stat. Throwing something uses the Athletics Skill, which typically uses the Body Stat, reflecting the strength needed to throw something far. But if you need to throw it with unusual precision, the GM might call for a Coordination + Athletics roll instead. If you need to figure out how a strange new gun works, the GM might call for a Mind + Ranged Weapon (Pistol) roll.

Rolling Without Skill Dice

You can almost always attempt a Stat + Skill roll with only your Stat dice, even if you have no Skill dice at all. But with Skills that require specialized training you won't be able to do more than rudimentary tasks. How this works is up to the GM.

Say you need to make a Language (Swahili) roll and you don't have a single Swahili die. The GM might let you roll just your Mind dice to get the gist across with miming and body language—but you won't be able to communicate or understand anything in detail.

Or if you need to make a Drive (Jet Aircraft) roll to land a supersonic jet, the GM may let you roll just Coordination dice if you have someone talking you through it on the radio or if you've had

a few minutes to watch how it's done. But anything fancy is beyond you.

For Skills that the GM deems more intuitive—like Stability, Endurance or Perception—you can roll Stat dice without Skill dice with no penalty.

Body Skills

Athletics: You excel at athletic feats like climbing, jumping, swimming, running and throwing.

Block: You know how to defend yourself against hand-to-hand attacks.

Brawling: You are a bruiser and know how to attack with your hands, feet, and head.

Endurance: You can pace yourself, hold your breath, run, or resist the ill effects of environment and exertion longer than most people.

Melee Weapon (Type): You are skilled with a particular type of hand-to-hand weapon. If you don't have dice in a particular weapon, with the GM's permission you can substitute a related weapon Skill but at a -1d penalty. *Example Types:* Club, Knife, Bayonet, Sword, Axe.

Coordination Skills

Dodge: You are adept at dodging attacks, ducking out of the way of projectiles (or catching them if they're slow), and keeping your footing when unbalanced.

Driving (Type): You can drive or pilot some particular type of vehicle. If you don't have dice in a particular vehicle, with the GM's permission you can substitute another Driving Skill but at a -1d penalty. *Example Types:* Sailboat, Car, Motorcycle, Tank, Jet Aircraft, Helicopter, etc.

Ranged Weapon (Type): You are skilled with a particular type of ranged weapon. If you don't have dice in a particular weapon, with the GM's permission you can substitute a related weapon Skill but at a -1d penalty. *Example Types:* Crossbow, Hand Grenade, Machine Gun, Pistol, Rifle, Rocket Launcher, Submachine Gun, Tank Gun.

Stealth: You are light on your feet and know how pick pockets and remain unheard and out of sight. This typically means a dynamic contest between your Stealth and the target's Perception.

Sense Skills

Empathy: You have a keen sense of the emotional states of others.

Perception: You observe things that escape the notice of others.

Scrutiny: You are expert at searching for hidden or obscure things, from tracks to small clues at a crime scene.

Mind Skills

First Aid: With the proper equipment, you can treat minor wounds and help a badly injured patient survive long enough for more intensive treatment. See page 61.

Knowledge (Type): You have some particular area of expertise. This is a catch-all Skill that can cover just about anything not already listed. *Example Types:* Computer Systems, Criminology, Cryptology, Demolitions, Electronics, Engineering, Forgery, Mechanics, Surgery, Archeology, Bavarian Court Etiquette.

Language (Type): You can speak, read, and write a particular language. When using a Skill that requires you to speak or understand a foreign language, you must use the lower of your Language dice pool and the regular Skill dice pool. You can always speak and read your native language without having to roll. *Example Types:* Alien Language [specified], Arabic, Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish.

Medicine: You can treat illness and wounds through surgery and long-term care if you have access to the proper equipment. This Skill can't be higher than your First Aid Skill.

Navigation: You can navigate using a map, compass, timing, instrumentation, astrogation, or dead reckoning.

Research: Finding rare or hidden information.

Security Systems: You know how to avoid, bypass, and rewire the latest in electronic security systems.

Streetwise: You know how to get by on the streets both inside and outside the law.

Survival: You are aware of the dangers and pitfalls of inhospitable environments.

Tactics: You know how to use terrain, manpower, and equipment to coordinate attacks, prepare and avoid ambushes, outguess and outmaneuver an enemy, and gain the upper hand in battles. See **Using Tactics**, page 74.

Charm Skills

Lie: You can bluff your way past obstacles and contrive convincing falsehoods.

Performance (Type): You have an entertaining Skill and the confidence to perform it in front of large groups. If you don't have dice in a particular performance, with the GM's permission you can substitute another Performance Skill but at a -1d penalty. *Example Types:* Acting, Flute, Guitar, Public Speaking, Singing.

Persuasion: You can convince people to do what you want and to see your side of an argument.

Command Skills

Interrogation: You know the best ways to trick or coerce the truth out of a subject.

Intimidation: You can cause a person to fear you through physical or psychological threats. This usually means a contest between Intimidation and Stability.

Leadership: You can inspire, guide, calm and direct others in stressful situations.

Stability: You are not easily shocked, can function even in the most stressful or grotesque situations, and can resist psychological and physical coercion such as torture, telepathic attack, and brainwashing. See **Mental Trauma**, page 63.

Skill Options

Here are a few other approaches to handling Skills that might fit your game. These are optional rules, but they've worked well for some of our players.

Broader Skill Types: The "official" Skill list attempts to allow players plenty of room to customize their characters without requiring too much time of those who'd rather focus on powers. If you want to spend even less time on Skills, start with the "Type" Skills like Knowledge, Language and the weapon Skills. Use much broader types: Knowledge (Physical Sciences), say, instead of Astronomy, Chemistry and Physics.

Skill Examples

Dice	Skill Level	Proficiency Example
1d	Basic training	(Athletics) Can barely dog paddle.
2d	Moderate training and some experience	(Athletics) Can throw a football 20 yards accurately.
3d	Extensive training and experience	(Perception) Can detect a tap on the phone line.
4d	Expert training	(Knowledge (Chess)) Nationally-ranked chess champion.
5d	Master (human perfection)	(Lie) Can talk your way into a military facility.
6d	Superhuman	(Intimidate) Can bully the heavyweight boxing champion.
7d	Extraordinary	(Athletics) Can leap from limb to limb 40 feet up in a tree.
8d	Astonishing	(Dodge) Can catch arrows in mid-air.
9d	Unparalleled	(Perception) Can see in near-complete darkness.
10d	Supreme	(Knowledge (Education)) Can teach any subject from memory.

Skill Specialties: A Skill specialty is a very narrow application of an ordinary Skill. It's like adding a (Type) to any Skill. If you take 2d in Performance (Guitar) and add a 3d specialty in Performance (Guitar, Rock), you get 2d ordinarily but 5d when rocking.

Skill specialties cost 1 Point per die, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die.

Occupations: This is an alternate way of handling Skills altogether. Instead of treating Skills as specialized uses of Stats, they are broad categories of learning and experience that can apply to any Stats. So you might have "FBI Agent 3d," which would give a 3d Skill bonus to any Stat roll that involves your FBI Agent training and experience—things like shooting, driving, questioning suspects, and searching for evidence. With "Billionaire Playboy 4d" you'd be expert with any Stat roll involving sports cars, yachts, making a big impression at parties, borrowing money, and womanizing.

Occupations cost 5 Points per die, 10 per Hard Die, and 20 per Wiggle Die.

Contacts: Contacts reflect relationships that your character has with useful nonplayer characters in the game. They use a rating called Contact (Character), which works just like a Charm Skill: You can roll your Contact dice with your Charm Stat to get some restricted piece of information or some clearance or other resource that you wouldn't ordinarily have. Each Contact is a different, specific NPC.

If the Contact roll succeeds, you don't have to make some other Skill roll later. You don't have to bluff your way past the guards, because your contact gave you a false ID; you don't have to roll Research because your contact pointed you to the right data.

You can use each Contact once per game session. If you're desperate you can push a Contact to help again in the same session, but then you can't use that Contact again until you do some significant favor for the NPC in return.

Most contacts use regular dice, but with the GM's permission even an ordinary human can have Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice in a Contact. Hard Dice mean the contact is in your debt and always attempts to comply with your request. Wiggle Dice mean the contact cares for you personally and does anything within his or her power to help you.

Contact costs 2 Points per die, 4 per Hard Die and 8 per Wiggle Die.

Wealth: Money makes all things easier. A Wealth rating allows you to gain bonus dice to Skill rolls by dint of superior equipment, strategic donations, hired help—anything money can do to help. You can add Wealth dice to any roll, as long as the GM approves. Since it takes time to transfer funds and make purchases, using Wealth increases the time required for the action; the exact amount is up to the GM.

You can use each Wealth die once per game session, but you don't have to use them all at once. With the GM's permission you can use a spent die again in the same session, borrowing money or other resources—but then you can't use that Wealth die again in this session or in the NEXT game session because you're paying off the debt.

With the GM's permission, even an ordinary human can have Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice in Wealth. You don't have to be a superhero to be fabulously rich.

Wealth costs 2 Points per die, 4 per Hard Die and 8 per Wiggle Die.

Secondary Score: Base Will

Base Will and Willpower are secondary scores based on your Stats. They are measured in points rather than dice: If your Base Will score is 7, it's just 7, not 7d.

Base Will defines your innate strength of character. It rarely changes. Most thinking entities have a Base Will score, but certain characters—such as robots and certain aliens—do not. Base Will is difficult to increase (see **Character Advancement**, page 56) and few characters have Base Will much higher than its starting value.

Related to Base Will, Willpower points are the province of extraordinary or superhuman characters. If you have a lot of Willpower, your powers are more reliable. If your Willpower is low, your abilities may fail you when you need them most. Most superhumans have both a Base Will score and a Willpower score.

Superhumans—and even ordinary humans in some circumstances—can also use Willpower and Base Will to influence events in their favor. With Willpower you have greater control over yourself and can extricate yourself from dangerous situations; and when necessary you can give up Base Will for even more dramatic impact.

Base Will equals the sum of your Charm and Command Stats. The types of dice in those Stats don't matter, just the number. With 3d (or 3hd, or 3wd) in Charm and 2d (or 2hd, or 2wd) in Command, your Base Will is 5. If either of those Stats goes up, so does your Base Will. You can increase it at a cost of 3 Points per point of Base Will.

Base Will	Description
1–3	Weak-willed
4–10	Typical to above-average inner strength
11–20	Strong-willed
21+	Tremendous fortitude and drive

Gaining Base Will Points

The only way to gain or recover Base Will points is by improving your character with Experience Points. (See **Character Advancement**, page 57.)

Spending Base Will

Base Will can be spent to help you resist coercion, mental trauma, and psychic attacks. Spending Base Will should always be a last resort, however, because it does not return or increase on its own; you can only get it back through character advancement. Once it's gone, it doesn't come back easily. (See **Character Advancement**, page 56.)

Once per scene, you can spend a single point of Base Will (or more if you're supporting a Motivation—see page 54) for one of the following effects:

- Immediately gain 10 Willpower points.
- Increase the width of any roll by 1.
- Increase the height of any roll by 1.
- Add 1wd to any pool.
- Keep yourself alive (but comatose) for one hour, even if you've taken otherwise lethal damage to your head or torso.
- Negate the effects of a failed Trauma Check (see page 63).
- Negate the effects of mental control or coercion, such as by a very high Charm Stat (page 46) or Command Stat (see page 46) or a mind control power (see page 151).
- In some circumstances, improve a Stat, Skill, or Miracle. (See **Character Advancement**, page 56.)

Losing Base Will

You can lose Base Will if you run out of Willpower. If you hit zero Willpower points and something causes you to lose still more Willpower points, you lose a point of Base Will instead. (The amount of Willpower you would ordinarily lose doesn't matter; whether you would lose half your Willpower or a single Willpower point, at zero Willpower each such incident reduces your Base Will by one.)

Zero Base Will Points

If you normally have a Base Will score and your Base Will hits zero, it's a bad thing—it means you've reached emotional rock bottom. Nothing is right until your Base Will score is positive again.

Until you recover at least 1 point of Base Will, you suffer all the effects of having zero Willpower (page 53). In addition, you can't use your Charm or Command Stats at all. You may still use Charm or Command Skills, but roll only the Skill dice, not Stat dice.

Secondary Score: Willpower

Willpower points start equal to your Base Will, but they rise and fall as you gain or lose confidence in yourself and your abilities. You can increase your starting Willpower at a cost of 1 Point per point of Willpower.

When you accomplish goals in the game (like defeating a villain, solving a puzzle, or saving an innocent from harm), you gain Willpower. When you fail, you lose it.

You can also spend Willpower points to push yourself in a crisis, boosting your performance or shaking off harm.

Think of Base Will as the oil well, and Willpower as the oil that comes from it.

Gaining Willpower

There are several ways to increase your Willpower.

Motivation: If you do something difficult on behalf of a subject of your Loyalty (see page 54) or your Passion (page 55), you gain Willpower points.

Heroism: If you voluntarily place yourself in harm's way to protect another (and succeed!), gain a Willpower point.

Spectacular performance: If you do something particularly spectacular or gratifying, or something that boosts your character's self-esteem significantly, gain a Willpower point. (If all the players cheer, you've probably made this one.)

Natural "10": If you roll a set of matching 10s (Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice don't count!), you gain a point of Willpower. You don't even have to use the match—just knowing you could is enough.

Victory: If you subdue a superhuman in combat, you gain his or her Base Will score in Willpower points. If the one you subdue doesn't have a Base Will score—a robot, for instance—you gain the sum of its Mind and Command Stats in Willpower points. If you had help, divide the total among all who assisted.

Rest: If you get a good night's sleep and your Willpower is lower than your Base Will, you gain a Willpower point.

(Having characters regain Willpower slowly by resting serves two purposes: It makes Willpower loss a serious issue, and it encourages characters to take action in the game to regain it in other ways. If you want Willpower to be less crucial in your game, you can allow characters to regain it more quickly.)

Spending Willpower

Willpower drives achievement. Here are some ways to push yourself beyond your ordinary limits during the game.

Gift: If the circumstances are right, at any time you can "give" any number of Willpower points to another character, giving an ally the strength to do what needs to be done. Even better, you get to say how the recipient is allowed to spend the Willpower points that you donate. What makes for the "right" circumstances are up to the GM, but they often involve shouts of encouragement or working in close concert. This might require an Empathy, Leadership, or Tactics roll.

Improvement: In some circumstances you can spend Willpower to improve a Stat, Skill or Miracle. (See page 56.)

Inspiration: In the roll phase, you can spend a point of Willpower to gain one bonus die, just as

if you took extra time for the action. (The two-die cap for taking extra time applies.)

Intuition: In the declaration phase, you can spend a point of Willpower to “move back” one place in the order of declarations. If your Sense Stat is 2, Intuition lets you spend a point of Willpower to declare as if you had Sense 3.

Resist influence: In the resolution phase, you can spend a point of Willpower to buy off a point of width in a power that changes your body (such as a physical transformation) or mind (such as mind control). If you reduce its width to 1, the power fails. This applies to powers that cause some major change, not ordinary attacks.

Shake it off: In the resolution phase, you can reduce the damage of an attack against you. You can spend one point of Willpower to remove one point of Shock; or you can spend one Willpower to to change a point of Killing to Shock; or you can spend two Willpower to remove one point of Killing damage. Generally this applies to an attack that you took in that particular round, but if the GM agrees you can make an Endurance roll to shake off damage that you took earlier.

Stay alive: At any time, if you’ve taken enough damage to your head or torso to kill you, you can spend a point of Willpower to keep yourself alive (but unconscious) for one round.

Wake up: In the declaration phase, if you’re unconscious you can risk half your Willpower to make an Endurance roll. If you succeed, you regain consciousness for width in rounds and lose only one point of Willpower. If you fail, you remain unconscious and lose half your Willpower.

Losing Willpower

Failure, defeat, and tragedy sap the morale and will of the best of us. They wreak havoc with the abilities of superhumans. There are many ways to lose Willpower:

Motivation: If you fail to support a subject of your Loyalty (see page 54) or Passion (page 55), you lose Willpower points.

Trauma: If you fail a Stability roll for mental trauma, you lose half your current Willpower points.

Tragedy: If a personal tragedy occurs in your life (a friend dies violently, your wife leaves you, etc.), you lose half your current Willpower points.

Defeat: If you are subdued in combat (real combat, not friendly sparring), you lose half your current Willpower points.

“Save me!”: If you attempt to save someone but fail, you lose the victim’s Base Will score in Willpower points.

Last point: If you have only 1 Willpower point left and some event causes you to lose half your Willpower, your Willpower drops to zero.

Zero Willpower Points

Superhuman feats are fueled by self-confidence and inner drive. When your Willpower reaches 0, your self-confidence is shot. All Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Miracles are weakened except those that are built into an external device such as a gun or a magic sword. All Wiggle Dice and Hard Dice become regular dice and all dice pools are cut in half. (Superhuman Stats and Powers that are native to your character are not affected; see **Inhuman Stats**, page 97, and **Native Power**, page 127).

Any further Willpower loss—due to failed Trauma Checks or anything else—reduces Base Will instead (see page 51).

Motivations

So, your character can do the impossible. He flies out into the world, righting wrongs. Or maybe she goes on clandestine missions, using her powers to serve the greater good. Or maybe he figures the greatest good of all is the guy looking back at him in the mirror. Now that you can do the impossible, what exactly are you going to do? And more importantly, why?

In *Wild Talents*, motivations are the things that drive your character. When you do things to support or further your motivations, you get Willpower points. When you fail to support or further your motivations, you lose Willpower points.

There are two kinds of motivations in *Wild Talents*: Loyalties and Passions. Each character must choose at least one of each.

The way it works is pretty simple. You “invest” your Base Will in your motivations. Divide your Base Will among your motivations however you like. If you want one point of Base Will in one motivation and all the rest in another, that’s fine. But each point of Base Will must be invested.

The more you have invested in a motivation, the more Willpower you can potentially get from doing things on behalf of that motivation—and the more you can lose if you fail.

Classic superheroes tend to be loyal to their families and communities, and passionate about things like truth, justice, and (depending on nationality) the American way. What motivates your character?

Loyalty

Loyalty is commitment to a person, group or cause. It could be the formal duty of an oath of allegiance to your country, or it could be very personal devotion to a single person.

Of course, swearing an oath doesn’t guarantee loyalty—but when you have loyalty as a motivation, it is a powerful force in your life whether you’ve sworn to it formally or not.



Gaining Willpower: You gain Willpower by supporting, serving, or protecting the subject of your loyalty, and by receiving accolades, acknowledgement of your service, or some other affirmation from it. If you're loyal to The City, you get Willpower by saving a citizen's life or having a glowing op-ed page written about you in the paper.

Be proactive! If the current action does not seem to involve the subject of your loyalty, FIND a way to involve it. Go out of your way to seek out whatever has your character's loyalty. Don't just wait for the GM to work it into the game; he has enough on his plate already.

The amount of Willpower you gain is up to the GM, and depends on the circumstances. A minor triumph is worth one or two points of Willpower. A truly spectacular achievement might gain you a number of Willpower equal to the Base Will that you have invested in the loyalty. In any single game session, you can't gain more Willpower from supporting a motivation than you have Base Will invested in it.

Losing Willpower: You lose Willpower by attempting to serve your loyalty and failing. The amount of Willpower you lose is up to the GM and depends on the circumstances. A minor failure loses you one or two Willpower. A catastrophic failure might lose you Willpower equal to the amount of Base Will that you have invested in the loyalty.

You also lose Willpower by letting opportunities to show your loyalty pass by. If you have a chance to do something on behalf of the subject of your loyalty, and you don't bother, you lose a point of Willpower.

Spending Base Will: In a single scene, you can spend as much Base Will in direct support of a loyalty as you have invested in that loyalty. Whether it's really "in support" of the loyalty always depends on the circumstances and is ultimately a judgment call for the GM.

Using Motivations

Game moderators, pay attention here. Conflicting motivations within a character make for great roleplaying—and so do conflicting motivations between characters! If you can find a way to make one character's motivations conflict with another character's motivations, you're on your way to roleplaying gold. Take a look at their loyalties and passions, and use them as ingredients in the game's story—by making sure they are in conflict. Find ways to have each character's loyalty or passion conflict with some other character's loyalty or passion; and if that doesn't work, make a character's own loyalty and passion clash. Willpower, the fuel of super-human powers, gives the players an immediate, palpable stake in the roles they play.

Passion

A passion is something that drives you personally. It could be art, romance, wealth, or fame; whatever it is, people who are dedicated to their passions tend to achieve great things—and also tend to leave their obligations to others behind in the process. Passions and loyalties tend to conflict.

Gaining Willpower: You gain Willpower by fulfilling your passion in some measure. If your passion is fame, you gain Willpower when you see yourself in the news or sign a book deal. If your passion is art, you gain Willpower by having your work published or exhibited. If your passion is romantic conquests—well, you get the idea.

The amount of Willpower you gain is up to the GM, and depends on the circumstances. A minor success is worth one or two Willpower. A truly spectacular achievement can gain you a number of Willpower equal to the Base Will that you have invested in the passion. In any single game session,

you can't gain more Willpower from pursuing a passion than you have Base Will invested in it.

As with loyalties, it's up to you to find ways to involve the subject of your passion in the game. Take charge of what your character does, and always consider the reasons, and whether they serve his or her motivations.

Losing Willpower: You lose Willpower by attempting to fulfill a passion and failing. As with loyalties, the amount that you lose is up to the GM and depends on the circumstances. A minor failure costs you one or two Willpower; a catastrophe might cost you Willpower equal to the amount of Base Will that you have invested.

And as with loyalties, you lose Willpower by letting an opportunity to pursue your passion pass you by. If you have a chance to pursue it and you don't bother, you lose a point of Willpower.

Spending Base Will: In a single scene, you can spend as much Base Will in direct support of a passion as you have invested in that passion. Whether it's really "in support" of the passion always depends on the circumstances and is ultimately a judgment call for the GM.

Character Advancement

Developing your character over time is half the fun of roleplaying. Characters gradually get better at Skills, Stats and even powers. A character that begins as a neophyte crime fighter can develop over several game sessions into the scourge of the underworld. Three things let you advance your character: Experience Points, Willpower points, and (sometimes) Base Will.

The GM gives Experience Points at the end of a game session as a reward, representing how well your character did in the trials and tribulations of the game.

Willpower points are the fuel of superhuman abilities—in a crisis they can be "cashed in" to improve existing Stats, Skills, and powers.

Base Will is your essential drive and determination, and it can sometimes be a catalyst for dramatic change.

Gaining Experience Points

Experience Points (or XP) reward the players and help them build their characters. It's the GM's responsibility to distribute Experience Points fairly.

Every time a player shows up and plays in the game, his or her character earns one Experience Point.

At the end of each session, the GM gives out bonus Experience Points as he or she sees fit, up to one per player. Usually a bonus point is given to the player who best stayed in character, or who had the best ideas, or otherwise best supported everyone else's good time. This is also a good way to reward characters with significant disadvantages—the blind superhero whose player remembers not to get a clue from a bulletin board, or the traumatized veteran who plays a flashback for all it's worth. It's also a good way to help a character who just needs to catch up with the others.

Finally, at the end of each session the players all vote to give out one more Experience Point democratically. Hand out slips of paper if you want to make it anonymous. If there's a tie, the Experience Point is not awarded.

(Players, play fair! "Politicking" for votes—"you vote for me this session, I'll vote for you next time"—is a good way to miss out on GM-given bonus Experience Points!)

Disadvantages

There's no end of problems that can plague your character but which aren't reflected in the rules for Archetypes and powers. What if your character is blind? What if he can't walk? What if he has a bad reputation? What if he's got tuberculosis?

Wild Talents doesn't give you extra character Points for those things. Sorry. Really, the list is just too long, and if we start giving Points for one or two of them we'll have to devote a whole chapter to all the rest, and nobody wants that. Nobody on our staff, anyway.

If your character has some drastic limitation—blindness, deafness, asthma, a lousy PR staff—here's what you do. Write it down on your character sheet in the "Disadvantages" space. Tell the GM and the other players. Then play to your weakness.

If your accurate playing of your disadvantage actually causes you or your companions some trouble in a game session, the GM can give you a bonus Experience Point at the end of that session.

If your character's legally blind, don't roll Perception to spot the clue in the corner. If that means your group misses the clue—or if it causes an irritating delay to send backup because the others forgot that they left the blind guy in charge of searching the room—you get a bonus Experience Point.

And if you have more than one disadvantage, and you manage to have major problems with each one, you can get even more Experience Points.

If this all sounds a lot like license to screw over your fellow players and friendly NPCs just to get a few extra XP, well, in a way, that's exactly what it is. Cultivate your sense of mischief and have some fun.

Between-Game Development: Spending XP

Most character advancement takes place after a game session has ended, when the GM says your character has some down time to practice and reflect. This requires Experience Points, which you can use only between games. With Experience Points, any amount of advancement is possible.

Advancing with experience requires some catalyst such as practice, training, or exceptionally powerful motivation. That means you can spend Experience Points to improve a Stat, Skill, Base Will, or a power that you've been attempting to use regularly in play (successful use is not required—just consistent attempts). You can also gain a new Skill or improve a Stat or Skill if you get serious training in it.

Or, lacking practice or training, with the GM's permission you can improve any Stat, Skill, or power (but not Base Will) by spending 1 Base Will on top of the Experience Points, representing an overwhelming drive to reach beyond your limitations.

The cost of advancing with Experience Points is the same as buying the Stat, Skill, or power during character creation.

In-Game Development: Spending Willpower

You can improve your character while actually playing the game by spending Willpower points. This change is instantaneous. There are restrictions, however.

First, you can only increase a single ability (whether a Stat, Skill or Miracle) by 1 die (of any type) per game session.

Second, you can only do it during a crisis. A particularly hard workout or sparring match with your teammate isn't good enough; only a genuine, everything-on-the-line, impending-catastrophe kind of crisis will do.

Third—and this is the big one—it costs 1 Base Will to make the change, in addition to the Willpower cost of the improvement.

The cost is the same as during character creation; if your Miracle normally costs 3 Points per die, it costs 6 Willpower to improve it by 1hd during play.

To “upgrade” dice costs the difference between the current die cost and the new die cost: To change that same 3-Point Miracle from 4d to 3d+1wd—upgrading 1d to 1wd—costs 9 Willpower, the difference in cost between 1wd and 1d.

New Powers and New Meta-Qualities

With the Mutable Meta-Quality (see page 100) and the GM's permission, you can gain an entirely new power. How you explain the new power is up to you and the GM—perhaps through spontaneous mutation, an experiment gone wrong, or as a natural development from whatever gave you superhuman powers in the first place. (“As you suspected,

the radioactive serum seems to be interacting with your existing mutations in strange ways. . . .”)

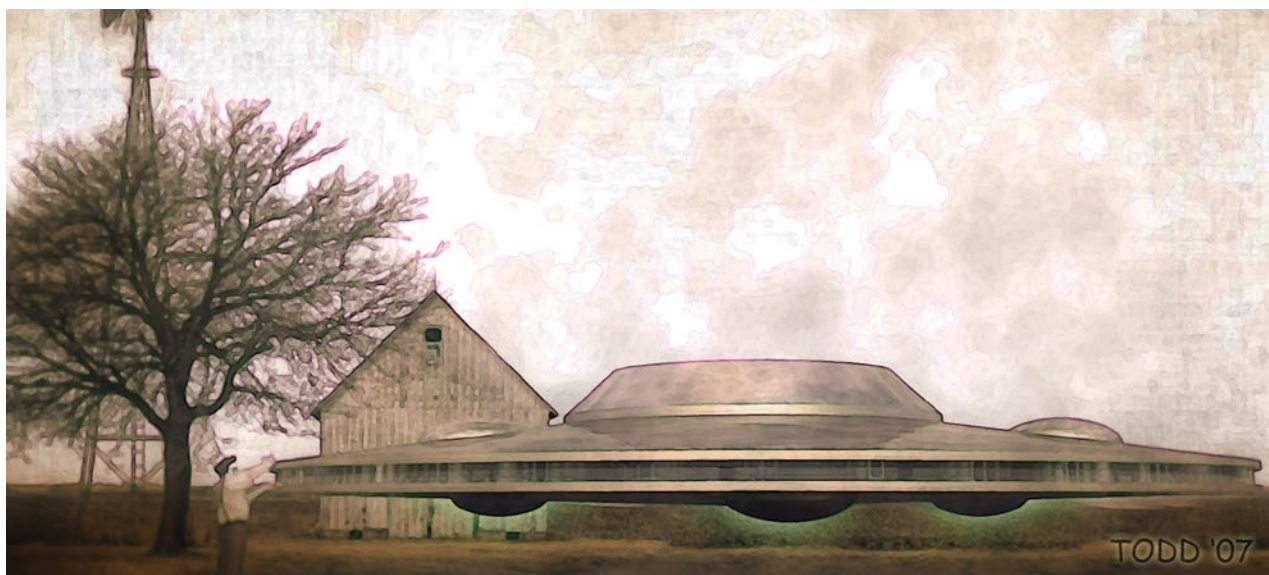
Buying a new power costs 1 Base Will per die or level purchased plus the usual Willpower or Experience Point cost of gaining the dice.

With the GM's permission and the Mutable Meta-Quality, you can purchase new Meta-Qualities for your Archetype. Making such a fundamental change to your character is very expensive—you must pay the Meta-Quality cost in Base Will points. You can invest in a new Meta-Quality, however, spending Base Will over time until you have paid the entire cost.

Characters Without Will

If you have the No Base Will Meta-Quality (see page 100), you have no Base Will and no Willpower. This means you can use Experience Points to improve, but not Willpower or Base Will. You lack the drive to improve or change your abilities during play or to develop entirely new powers—unless someone who has Base Will helps you along.

A character who has Base Will and Willpower can gift enough of it to you (see page 52) to allow you to improve, but there's a big limit to such a gift: The character making the gift chooses how you can use the Willpower.



Chapter 4: Combat

Here's where we get into some of the most important rules in the game—the things that can injure or kill your character. Because combat and other threats change the game so drastically, the rules for them are quite specific.

Sure, it may be important for you to reroute the heliship's power with your Control [Electricity] Miracle, but usually you don't need to know the details—just whether it worked or not. But if some goon is trying to plug you with a sniper rifle, you need to know exactly when and where he does it.

The Three Phases of a Combat Round

Each round of combat is broken into three phases: declare, roll, and resolve. When all three are done and every character in combat has acted, the next round begins and the cycle starts all over again.

1) Declare

Describe your character's action. The character with the lowest Sense Stat declares first, because a character with a higher Sense is more aware of what's going on in the fight and is better able to respond. Non-player characters declare in order of Sense just like players. If two characters have the same Sense Stat, use the Perception Skill and the Mind Stat (in that order) as tiebreakers.

When you declare, make it short and specific. That doesn't mean you can't make it dramatic. "I smash the guy in the face" is the same action as "I'm glad you emptied your gun at me, 'cause now it'll be warm when you eat it!" but one is a little more engaging than the other. If you're doing something special—dodging, attempting two things at once, aiming at a specific body part, helping a teammate with some action, or using a martial arts maneuver—say so now.



2) Roll

Each character rolls the dice pool appropriate to the declared action—usually a Miracle, a Stat, or a Stat + Skill dice pool. Since all characters have already declared their actions, all roll at the same time and figure out their actions' width and height.

3) Resolve

The character with the widest roll always acts first. If two sets are equally wide, the taller roll goes first. All actions are resolved in order of width. If five characters roll 5x5, 3x6, 4x6, 2x3 and a 3x10, their actions are resolved in the following order: 5x5 first, then 4x6, then 3x10, then 3x6, and then 2x3. This means any action wider than your roll happens before your action—even if you're trying to dodge or defend against that attack. If it's wider, it happens before you can act or react.

When an attack hits, it immediately inflicts damage. If you suffer any damage before your roll is resolved, you lose a die out of your tallest match—since being punched, stabbed, or shot is very, very distracting. If your set is ruined (reduced to no matching dice), the action fails, even if you rolled a success. You lose a die every time you take damage.

That's all there is to a combat round. Everyone says what they're doing, they roll, actions happen in width order, and then it starts over again.

Damage

Damage in *Wild Talents* is specific. When you're hit, a single roll of the dice tells you exactly where you're hit and for how much damage.

Types of Damage

There is a world of difference between getting punched in the gut and getting stabbed there. A punch aches and bruises, but unless you're pummeled for a long while you're unlikely to suffer any lasting harm. Being stabbed or shot is entirely different—your internal organs are re-arranged and

exposed to all kinds of germs, viruses, and pollutants. Damage that penetrates the skin is serious.

In *Wild Talents* there are two types of damage: Shock and Killing.

Shock damage shakes you up and can be dangerous in the short term, but is usually shaken off quickly. It represents blunt trauma, concussion, shallow surface cuts, or light bleeding.

Killing damage is just what it sounds like—damage that can quickly end your life. It represents puncture wounds, deep cuts, organ trauma, ballistic damage, heavy bleeding, or burning. Sometimes Killing damage is reduced to Shock damage due to armor or other effects; when this is important, 1 point of Killing damage is equivalent to 2 points of Shock.

Hit Location

The location of an injury is usually much more important than the amount of damage; given the choice between having someone stomp on my foot or my face, I'll pick the foot every time.

If you take a wound for both Shock and Killing damage, always apply the Killing damage first, then the Shock.

Once all the wound boxes in the head are filled with Shock damage or a mix of Shock and Killing, you're unconscious. If your head boxes fill with Killing, you're dead.

When your torso fills with Shock or a mix of Shock and Killing, your Body and Coordination are reduced by 4d each until you recover at least 1 point of Shock. If your torso is filled with Killing, you're dead. At the GM's option, if you take a serious wound to the torso—three or more Killing damage from a single wound—you may take one Shock per round from bleeding until you get medical treatment.

When a limb is filled with Shock damage or a mix of Shock and Killing, you can't use it to perform any Skill or action. If it's a leg, your running speed is cut

in half; if it happens to both legs, your movement is reduced to 0.

If a limb is filled with Killing, it's seriously damaged and may never be as good again. The GM decides the exact effect based on the nature of the attack and injury and the quality of medical care you receive. Maybe it reduces Stat + Skill rolls using that limb by -1d because it never quite heals properly, or you lose a wound box from that location permanently; or the attack might cut it clean off.

Once all wound boxes in a limb fill with Killing, any further damage to that limb goes straight to the torso.

At the GM's discretion, any serious injury may call for a Trauma Check (page 63).

EXAMPLE: A fanatic from the End Gang kicks The Red Scare with a 3x5. That does width in Shock damage, so The Red Scare takes 3 Shock to hit location 5, his right arm. The next round, another End Gang thug stabs The Red Scare with a big knife that inflicts width in Killing, rolling 3x6. The Red Scare suffers 3 Killing damage, again to the right arm. He started with 5 wound boxes on his right arm, so 2 of the 3 Killing points fill the 2 empty wound boxes. The third point of Killing damage is divided between two of the three boxes that already have Shock. The Red Scare's mauled right arm now has 4 Killing and 1 Shock inflicted on it—it's so badly hurt it can't be used. One more point and it might be unusable forever!

The Damage Silhouette

Every character sheet has a damage silhouette with a bunch of wound boxes representing how much Shock and Killing damage a character can sustain. On a normal human, the damage silhouette is shaped like a human body, with hit locations split into legs, arms, tor-

so, and head. The height of an attack roll determines which hit location takes the damage.

If you're hit, mark off a wound box for each point of damage sustained. If it's Shock, put a single diagonal line through each box. If it's Killing damage, put an "X" through each box.

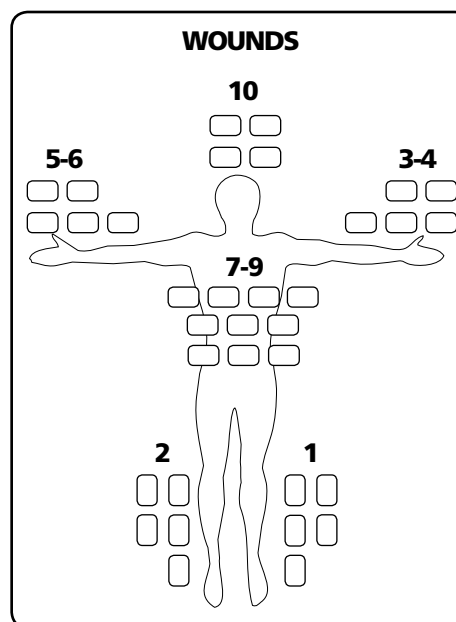
When new damage strikes a hit location, fill unmarked boxes first, if there are any. Shock damage becomes Killing if all a hit location's wound boxes are filled. Once all the wound boxes are marked with Shock, any further damage to that location is automatically counted as Killing damage.

Healing

Damage is nasty stuff, so you're naturally wondering how to get rid of it.

Healing Shock Damage

Shock can be healed with the First Aid Skill, if you have the right tools—a complete first aid kit with bandages, splints, and painkillers usually does the trick. The character performing first aid makes a First Aid roll with the total amount of damage in the hit location as a Difficulty number, up to a



Hard Dice and Location

Hard Dice are powerful but inflexible—they're always set at 10. That usually means an attack with two or more Hard Dice automatically hits a target in the head. If the head is behind a wall or otherwise inaccessible, you can only hit if you roll a match to hit an uncovered location with other dice in the dice pool. Your Hard Dice attack is simply too instinctively lethal for you to change it consciously; that's what Wiggle Dice are for.

If this quirk of Hard Dice irks you, see the options for fixed dice and expert dice on page 26; these options allow you to pick any hit location to "marry" to the Hard Dice, or to even switch which hit location they target before you roll.

What About My Organs?

You may have noticed that the torso with its mighty ten wound boxes is especially robust compared to the head. *Wild Talents* glosses over the risk of internal injuries in order to give player characters a better chance at surviving. We assume that a blow to the torso hits the ribcage and perhaps what's underneath, but is survivable if you get modern medical treatment.

If you like things to feel more deadly, you could simply rename "Head" to "Head and Vitals." A strike at hit location 10 could be the head or it could be center mass, right in or around the heart and spine.

Or you could keep the hit locations the same but add the following rule: If a single attack to the torso fills half the torso's wound boxes, the result is the same as if ALL the torso's wound boxes were filled. If you have 10 torso wound boxes, a single attack for five Killing to the torso kills you outright.

maximum of 10 (so if a limb has 2 Killing and 4 Shock damage, the Difficulty is 6). Each successful use of the First Aid Skill heals a number of Shock points equal to the width of the roll; a failed roll, however, inflicts 1 point of Shock.

First aid can be used once per wound. To keep track, simply put a check mark next to the hit location each time you take a wound and erase it when you get first aid.

First aid can never heal Killing damage—only real medical treatment can do that.

Shock can also be healed with rest. Every game day, if you get a good night's rest, you recover half the Shock damage on each hit location (if you have only 1 point of Shock on a location, it heals completely).

Healing Killing Damage

Killing damage takes a lot longer to heal. Short of some kind of superhealing Miracle, it can only be cured by serious medical attention—meaning surgery and a hospital stay, or prolonged bed rest.

When you get real medical treatment, the doctor must roll Medicine; the First Aid Skill does not apply. The procedure converts a number of Killing points to Shock equal to the height of the successful roll.

With modern equipment it takes 5 – width hours; with more advanced technology it might take less time, and with primitive techniques it might take longer and entail a grave risk of infection. Each hit location is treated with a separate operation.

You can also recover Killing damage with extensive bed rest. For each week of complete rest, 1 point of Killing is converted to Shock on each hit location. If it's in a hospital, roll the doctor's Medicine or equivalent dice pool and convert width in Killing to Shock instead.

Primitive Medicine

If your game takes place in an era before the wonders of antibiotics and soap, healing can be a tricky business. Each time you take Killing damage, put a check mark next to the hit location. If the damage was from a puncture wound, circle the check mark as a reminder. If the Killing damage isn't healed within 24 hours, make an Endurance roll at Difficulty 2 (or 4 if it's a puncture wound). If you fail, the wound becomes infected and all natural healing ceases. An infected wound takes 1 Shock immediately. Damage from infection does not heal with rest and cannot be relieved with First Aid or reduced with Willpower. After infection sets in, you can attempt the same Endurance roll once per day to fight it off and begin to heal normally. If it fails, you take 1 Shock each day. If all else fails, somebody can amputate the infected limb; a First Aid or Medicine roll keeps you from bleeding to death.

Mental Trauma

Combat isn't just hard on the body—it can be devastating to the psyche. And, unfortunately, so can many other things. Witnessing an atrocity such as innocents being gunned down; watching a disaster unfold without being able to help; undergoing torture (or committing it); murdering a helpless victim (even an evil one!); taking massive damage; being ambushed; staring instant death in the face—any of these can cause mental trauma. Any time your character suffers some terrible fright, threat, or injury, you must make a Trauma Check.

A Trauma Check is a Stability Skill roll. If it succeeds, you suffer no ill effects. If it fails, you have a choice to make.

You can remove yourself from the action immediately—whether it's by simply refusing to do whatever triggered the check, or by turning tail and running, collapsing in a heap, or going all glassy-eyed; the exact response is up to you—and lose half your current Willpower.

Or you can tough your way through it, doing whatever you were trying to do, and lose all your current Willpower.

If you have a Base Will score but no Willpower—most humans who don't have powers are in this camp; so are Talents who run out of Willpower—you lose 1 Base Will if you tough it out, none if you collapse or flee. If you run out of Base Will, things get bad; see **Zero Base Will Points**, page 52.

Moral Choices

A Trauma Check is required for torturing or murdering a helpless victim because, well, those actions cause terrific psychic trauma to the one who does them. Committing murder is harder on the human mind than nearly anything else. It takes extensive training or indoctrination to inure people to cold-blooded murder, however just their cause.

Unless the GM says otherwise, that means lots of Command or Stability dice—that's most likely in professional soldiers and snipers—or a Base Will of 0, representing a cowardly butcher who murders out of fear, with no scruples left to violate.

Of course, there are certain people, called sociopaths (or psychopaths), who don't have this built-in inhibition against murder—even mass murder. Literally inhuman monsters, too, may have no compunctions about it. The GM may decide that such characters can murder without risking mental trauma, but such characters should suffer grave penalties to Empathy rolls. An automatic gobble die seems appropriate, making it impossible to make an Empathy check unless the character rolls a width of three or an extra set.

We don't recommend including player characters in that category. Not that they aren't free to commit atrocities, but there ought to be a choice involved, a risk, a sense that they may have to give something up if they keep doing it. Murder should matter.

If the GM allows it, when you face a Trauma Check for committing some violent act, you can

Optional Rules: Damage

Tired of getting your head knocked off at inopportune moments? At the GM's discretion, you can try some of these damage options to make life more livable.

Wound Shift: You can spend Willpower to change the hit location of a wound before taking the hit. It costs the width of the attack in Willpower to change the roll's height by 1, up or down. This does not affect the height of the attack roll in any other way (you can't use wound shift to make it miss altogether), and it can only be done immediately, during the resolve phase of the same combat round.

Die Hard: Increase the ratio of Shock to Killing damage. Instead of 2 Shock to 1 Killing point of damage it's 3 to 1, or even 4 to 1. This makes Shock damage much less dangerous.

Nothing But Shock: Change all Killing damage directly to Shock. An attack that inflicts 4 Shock and 4 Killing instead does 8 points of Shock. Additionally, Shock damage "bleeds" from limbs to torso before being converted to Killing; only if both the limb and the torso are filled with Shock does further damage turn the limb's Shock boxes to Killing. This is perfect for four-color games of the "superhero cartoon" variety, where a hero can take a serious beating before there's any risk of serious injury.

Four-Color Recovery: This option allows important characters to recover from Killing damage more quickly than usual even without medical treatment. If all Shock damage on the character has healed, once a day pick a hit location and roll Body + Endurance, with the total Killing damage on the location as a Difficulty number (to a maximum Difficulty of 10). If the roll succeeds, 1 Killing becomes 1 Shock.

make the roll before you actually commit the act. That gives you a chance to back away, a moment to choose your course. If you don't commit the act, you don't suffer the penalty for a failed Trauma Check. If you commit the act anyway, you suffer the psychic consequences.

Attacking Willpower

Attention, villains! Characters with superhuman powers are vulnerable in one way that they can rarely defend: Their Willpower. If a superhuman runs out of Willpower, all his or her powers suffer. So how do you reduce an enemy's Willpower? Hit them in the motivations! (See page 54.)

A superhuman who fails to support, uphold or protect the subject of a loyalty or passion loses Willpower. The more important it is to the character, the more Willpower can be lost. Hit them where they live, and it might leave them too weak to fight back when you hit them for real.

Armor

Armor is any substance that protects against physical attack. Anything that absorbs any amount of incoming damage is, by definition, armor.

In *Wild Talents* armor comes in two flavors, light armor and heavy armor. Light armor provides a Light Armor Rating (LAR) and heavy armor provides a Heavy Armor Rating (HAR).

Light Armor (LAR)

Light armor represents most personal body armor, from bulletproof Kevlar to medieval chainmail. It does two things. First, it reduces all Shock damage from the attack to one point. Second, it transforms a number of Killing damage points equal to its LAR to Shock.

So let's say you have LAR 3 and you get hit by an attack that does 6 Shock and 6 Killing damage. The LAR reduces the Shock damage to 1. Then it

changes the 6 Killing to 3 Shock and 3 Killing. You take a total of 4 Shock and 3 Killing.

If you have LAR 3 and you get hit for 6 Killing, with no Shock damage, the LAR changes it to 3 Shock and 3 Killing.

If you have LAR 3 and get hit for 6 Shock, with no Killing, the LAR changes it to 1 Shock.

Heavy Armor (HAR)

Heavy armor works a little differently. Heavy armor represents a rigid barrier that simply stops an attack cold without transferring any of its force to you. HAR 1 is equivalent to 1/2" solid steel or a reinforced concrete wall.

Heavy armor is very rare in personal armor because it's so bulky, but the heaviest forms of modern combat armor include half-inch steel plates in the torso that have HAR 1.

Heavy armor reduces the width of an attack roll—not the damage, the actual width of the roll—by its HAR. If the attack's width drops to 1 or less, it fails to inflict any damage at all.

Damage from a threat that doesn't depend on the width of an attack roll—the Area damage from an explosive, for example—is stopped entirely by Heavy Armor, unless it's the kind of threat that wouldn't be stopped by something like a sheet of solid steel. Heavy Armor is great at protecting you from shrapnel; it's not as good against suffocation.

Reducing width rather than damage makes HAR very much an all-or-nothing sort of protection. If a weapon is capable of punching through that much armor, it does nearly full damage to whatever is on the other side.

Of course, the fact that it affects width means that it's possible—not likely, but possible—for an ordinary attack to roll so well that it bypasses your HAR altogether. Maybe the attack just happened to hit a tiny gap in the barrier, armor, or bulletproof skin, with results as if it had a heavy weapon's ability to pierce armor. Exactly how you describe it is

up to you, but you have to respect an attack with that much luck, or that much superhuman skill, behind it.

(And if you don't like the idea of lucky shots piercing HAR, there's an easy fix: Just say that rather than reducing width, HAR blocks all attacks that don't have a Penetration rating capable of piercing it.)

Penetration

Some weapons and powers have a Penetration rating. Each point of Penetration reduces HAR and LAR by one. If you have both HAR and LAR, a single point of Penetration reduces both of them. This makes heavy armor very much an "all or nothing" sort of protection; if the attack has such penetration that it pierces the armor, it inflicts full damage. If not, it inflicts no damage.

However, some forms of armor are hardened against Penetration. This is rare outside of powers, but hardened armor is not reduced by weapon Penetration. The only way to defeat hardened heavy armor is to make an incredibly lucky attack—roll a massive width—and the only way to defeat hardened light armor is to hit with a weapon that does a large amount of damage.

Armor, Cover, and Hit Locations

Modern body armor typically offers protection from hand-to-hand attacks on all hit locations, and limited protection from firearm attacks to particular hit locations, such as the head and torso—but it's only useful if an attack hits a protected location. If you're wearing a helmet and you're shot in the leg, the attack is obviously not blocked.

Similarly, sometimes you're shooting at someone that's hiding behind something with an armor rating. Shots that otherwise might hit concealed hit locations strike the cover first.

See page 87 for a summary of armor values for various objects and barriers.

If you're shooting a target with only his head and arms showing, your shots hit the cover unless you manage to hit his head (location 10) or one of his arms (locations 3–4 or 5–6). Even if you miss an exposed hit location, any damage that makes it through the armor is inflicted on the target normally.

By the way, a human body is equivalent to HAR 1. The victim being used as cover takes full damage from the attack.



Stacking Armor

You can stack different types of body armor—heavy armor with light armor underneath, for example, or light armor with heavier pieces built into it. Damage is absorbed in the order they're stacked—so if you wear heavy armor on top of light armor, the HAR protects you first and whatever damage is left over is blocked by the LAR.

Modern body armor is too bulky to allow much stacking: You can't wear more HAR points on your whole body than you have Body dice and still move around and fight effectively. Each point of HAR in excess of your Body subtracts one penalty die from your Coordination while wearing the armor.

Add the HAR together for each hit location separately. Note that it's the armor rating of the location that matters, not the size of the hit location—a reinforced Kevlar vest with HAR 1 counts as 1 point, even though it protects three hit location numbers on the torso.

A similar restriction applies to Light Armor. You can wear a number of LAR points equal to your Body and Coordination added together. With Body 2 and Coordination 3, you could carry five points of LAR on various locations without penalty.

This does not apply to armor created by superhumans using magical or super-strong materials.

Pimp My Helmet!

According to the “Stacking Armor” rules, a character with Body and Coordination each at 10d can carry 20 points of mundane LAR, spread over various locations. That's a lot of Kevlar. Possibly, a character who's already that capable (or who has equally impressive damage defense) might want to give up a point of armor here or there just to carry some mundane equipment. Nothing so high-tech or expensive that it needs to be a Focus, just some handy gadgets on the utility belt.

Here are some suggested mundane gadgets that might be useful when built into a crime-fightin' (or

perpetratin’) outfit. Each has an “AR Equivalent” rating which simply means it’s the equivalent of that many points of armor, either LAR or HAR. Thus, if you’re a normal guy with Body and Coordination 2, you can carry 4 points of LAR without penalty, or you can carry 3 points of armor and night-vision goggles.

Night Vision Goggles (AR Equivalent 1)

These bulky goggles either amplify ambient light or project an invisible beam that can be read and displayed in the visible spectrum by sensors mounted on the front. Short version: You can see at night, though usually in funny colors. (Think the basement pursuit of Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*.) These won’t immediately let you succeed at Perception rolls by night, but they might allow rolls that, before, wouldn’t even be possible. A rule of thumb might be that they give +2 to +4 dice on Perception rolls to notice large objects. They can be pretty grainy, so they aren’t as good for noticing that one shell casing in the cluttered basement.

Gas Mask (AR Equivalent 1)

Stifling and uncomfortable, wearing a gas mask is still preferable to going down that long dark tunnel when the sarin kicks in. If you want to be really finicky, you can rule that this only gives a +4d bonus to rolls when resisting poisons. But frankly, if a player is going to give up a whole point of armor on his head just in case, I’d assume the gas mask works perfectly.

Loudspeaker/Voice Scrambler (AR Equivalent 1)

I particularly like the mental image of a guy with a big bullhorn on the top of his helmet. This is a device linked to a microphone. On one setting, it makes your voice sound really loud, so that you can be sure of being heard when you say, “Throw down your weapons, evildoers!” (Or “Help! I’m trapped in here!”) On the other setting, it makes your voice

sound eerie and difficult to identify, like the phone calls in the movie *Scream*. (Boy, murderous head-cases seem to be the early adopters for these technologies, don’t they?)

LADAR Rig (AR Equivalent 1)

This is very cutting edge: It’s like radar, only with lasers. A wiggling, low-intensity laser scans the relative distance of solid objects from a sensor right beneath it, and a compact computer resolves it into a visual image on a screen in front of the user’s eyes.

In practical terms, this gives a user 2hd in the power “Perceive: Shapes” (page 153). The wearer can see the outlines of what’s around him, including people and things that are normally invisible.

That’s pretty wonderful, right? But there are some serious drawbacks to the LADAR rig. First off, you can’t see colors or patterns or read through it. It doesn’t do a flawless job tracking movement. It’s heavy. It’s horribly expensive. It’s also a bright light right on your head, real easy to aim at even by night. Finally, it’s delicate. Any time you take damage to your 10 location—even if that damage is completely absorbed by armor—roll a die for each point of damage. If a match comes up, the LADAR is offline.

Cell Phone (AR Equivalent 1/2)

Little Bluetooth earphones are a snap to install, but for serious adventuring you want something a little more robust with a long-lasting power supply, some impact resistance and voice-activated dialing. Plus, it’s not very hard to listen in on those earphones.

Police Band Scanner (AR Equivalent 1/2)

This is a radio tuned to the bands reserved for police, fire-fighters, emergency dispatchers and ambulances. If you want to know where the action is, this helps. It also helps you know if the SWAT

team has been scrambled to your last known location.

Lights (AR Equivalent 1/2)

Putting a bright red light on top of your helmet may give people an easy target, but you have to admit it's flashy. Or you can put one on your arm as a spotlight, or light up your logo in neon on your chest behind impact-resistant plexiglass. If you're *really* brave, make like Spider-Man. He installed his right above his groin.

Camera (AR Equivalent 1/2)

A good (or even mediocre) digital camera can hold hundreds of pictures and aim itself. It's not quite as good as photographic memory, but it's a lot easier to acquire, plus more persuasive to cops and reality TV show producers. You might want to sink a few points into some kind of photography skill if you want anything other than blurry mementos, though.

Sound Recorder (AR Equivalent 1/2)

Just like the digital camera is good for getting a snapshot of the bad guy in action (or for capturing the entries in his address book), the digital voice recorder can be a good way to preserve auditory clues. The only question is, if someone doesn't know he's being recorded, can his, "Only you, my enemy, will appreciate the brilliance of my plan" speech be ruled admissible in court?

GPS Unit (AR Equivalent 1/2)

Little gadget with a screen, shows you where you are, longitude and latitude, can bring up maps and show you how to get home. Handy.

Hand-to-Hand Combat

Fighting hand-to-hand—whether it's superhuman kung fu, a laser-sword duel, or just rolling around in the mud—is a battle between opponents with the vague goal of "getting the upper hand." It's a messy business. Strength, speed, and aggressiveness are everything.

Hand-to-hand attacks use the Body Stat and whatever Skill is appropriate: Brawling to strike or grapple unarmed, or Melee Weapon to hit with a weapon. As usual, the height of your roll determines the hit location—roll 3x1 and you hit the guy in the leg—while width determines initiative (who goes first) as well as damage.

A hand-to-hand attack is a static roll. Trying to block one is a defense roll, which is an opposed roll against the attack roll. See page 28 for details.

Damage for hand-to-hand attacks is based on your Body Stat (see **Body Effects**, page 45, for details). Hand-to-hand weapons increase this damage, depending on how effective and deadly they are; they're described on page 85.

Special Maneuvers: Hand to Hand

As with noncombat special maneuvers (page 25), you can declare one of these special maneuvers instead of an ordinary attack. Attempting one of these moves causes you to lose a die from your dice pool before rolling.

You may attempt more than one special maneuver at a time, but—unless the maneuver's description says otherwise—you can't use the same special maneuver more than once with a single action.

Called shot: Set one die to any value before rolling the rest. See page 69.

Careful attack: If your attack ordinarily does Killing damage, inflict Shock instead.

Choke: Called shot to head, or pin first; 1 Shock per round. See page 70.

Daze: Target suffers width in penalty dice for width in rounds.

Determined attack: Ignore a botch result. See page 22.

Disarm: Make a called shot with Difficulty equal to the target's Body. See page 69.

Escape: Beat opponent's roll to escape a pin; see page 70. This maneuver does *not* give a -1d penalty.

Fast attack: +1 width for speed or initiative purposes only.

Feint: Make a Lie roll vs. target's weapon Skill. Target loses a die from highest set; you gain +1d to your next action against that target.

Knockdown: Target falls down, takes 1 Shock, and must spend one round (or one action with an Athletics roll) to get back up.

Multiple actions: If you roll two sets, you may use each with a separate action. You can attempt more than one extra action by giving up additional dice. See page 27.

Powerful attack: +1 width for damage or "impact" purposes only.

Shove: Target loses a die from highest set and moves back a few steps.

Vicious attack: If your attack ordinarily does Shock damage, inflict Killing instead.

Wrestle: One Shock; knocks you and target down; target pinned. See page 70.

Aiming

By taking your time and waiting for the right opening, you can improve your chances of hitting: For every combat round spent setting up your attack, add +1d to your dice pool. You can't take any other action while aiming, or add more than +2d in this fashion. If you're distracted (i.e., you have to roll another dice pool) or injured (i.e., you suffer any damage) while aiming, the bonus is lost.

Called Shots

Just getting the edge on an opponent in hand-to-hand combat is hard enough—trying to hit a specific body part is truly tricky.

Here's how it works: Drop one die from your dice pool because it's so much harder to target a specific hit location. (Remember, you lose Hard Dice first, then regular dice, and only then Wiggle Dice.)

Next, fix a die in your remaining pool to the hit location you're hoping to hit.

Now roll the remaining dice. If you come up with a set, you hit. If you score a set with the fixed hit location die, you hit that particular location.

The most popular hand-to-hand called shot is the knockout—a jab or blow to the head of a target (hit location 10) in an attempt to knock him unconscious. Be careful, though—if the target's head fills with Killing damage, that's it, he's dead.

Disarming

If someone's coming at you with a weapon, you're probably going to want to knock it away. Good luck.

Roll your attack at a -1d penalty and with the target's Body Stat as a Difficulty number. If you succeed, you do no damage but force the target to drop the weapon. If you succeed and your roll's width exceeds the target's, you can choose to either knock the weapon away or snatch it for yourself.

If you're trying this unarmed and you fail to beat the target's width and the weapon has an edge, it does 1 point of Killing to whichever limb you're using to disarm. If that seems harsh, just remember that when someone's trying to use a sword on you there's not much to grab but the pointy bits.

Wrestling and Pinning

Many fights end up with both fighters rolling around on the asphalt, each looking to hold the other guy down. To pin someone, first announce that's what you're doing in the declare phase. Then make a Brawling roll. It inflicts 1 point of Shock to the indicated hit location and knocks the target down. The target is now pinned until he escapes.

When pinned you can't dodge or take cover, and you can't attack anyone—including using firearms or attack powers—except the character that pinned you. Even worse, while you're pinned any hand-to-hand attack against you gains +1d.

You remain pinned until one of three things happens:

- Your attacker declares he's doing something else and lets you go.
- Your attacker is pulled off, knocked out or killed.
- You beat your attacker's roll in a dynamic contest with your own unarmed combat dice pool. You can attempt this once per round.

Choking and Strangling

Smothering, choking, and drowning are all the same thing: First you can't breathe, and then you pass out from lack of oxygen and die. To choke someone, make a Brawling roll and declare a called shot to the head. It inflicts 1 point of Shock immediately and another point of Shock to the head each round, until one of the following happens:

- You declare that you're doing something else.
- You take damage from any source.
- The victim beats your unarmed attack roll in a dynamic contest with his own unarmed combat dice pool. The victim may attempt this roll once a combat round.

If you pin your opponent first, you can begin choking him with any successful unarmed attack roll—you don't need a called shot to location 10.

But if you attempt a choke and fail, the target automatically escapes your pin.

Strangling works just like choking, but it cuts off the flow of blood to the brain instead of just air. Strangling inflicts 2 points of Shock to the head per round and requires the "vicious attack" special maneuver or some form of garrote.

Sneak Attack

Any time you attack someone who doesn't know he's going to be stabbed or clubbed, things are a lot easier. Add +1d to your dice pool in addition to any other bonuses, including bonuses for aiming. That's one of the benefits of shooting at someone that isn't screaming, dodging, or firing back.

You can combine this with special maneuvers; called shots and the "powerful attack" maneuver to gain bonus damage are popular with sneak attacks.

If you're sneaking up on a minor NPC, the victim is probably a minion (page 77); that makes the sneak attack even more effective.

There are three downsides. First, a sneak attack with a weapon that inflicts Killing damage is usually cold-blooded murder, and as such it triggers a Trauma Check. Second, the only way to make a sneak attack is to actually sneak up on the victim, and that requires a Stealth check, in a contest with the victim's Perception roll, the round before you launch your attack. Third, actually attacking someone is usually pretty noisy, since they tend to scream and thump around. To keep being sneaky while you do the deed, you need multiple actions: one for the attack, and another for Stealth.



Knockback!

Knockback is the fine art of knocking an enemy across the parking lot with a powerful attack.

A hand-to-hand attack does knockback if the attacker has six or more Body dice.

A power does knockback if it has at least six dice and a mass Power Capacity (see page 109).

If the power has multiple capacities, such as both range and mass, only the portion of the dice pool dedicated to mass count toward knockback.

Mundane, non-powered attacks can inflict knockback as well, but only if it's an impact from an object (such as a vehicle) with at least twice as much mass as the target.

If an attack inflicts knockback, it sends the victim flying **a number of yards equal to the total Shock and Killing damage**.

If knockback slams you into a wall or another character, you and the impediment each take impact damage (page 88). Determine the damage using the total knockback distance (as yards per round) minus the distance you traveled before the impact. If you take 10 yards of knockback and slam into a wall three yards away, you and the wall each

take impact damage from a speed of seven yards per round.

If you don't want to get knocked back by an attack, announce that you're resisting knockback in the declare phase. It doesn't take a roll—just subtract your Body Stat in yards from the knockback distance when figuring knockback. However, standing there and soaking up punishment is not fun. Each die of Body you use to resist knockback adds 1 point of Killing damage to the attack.

Several circumstances affect knockback, including the power's capacities and the target's size.

Circumstance	Knockback Modifier
Dice beyond 6d	+2 yards per die
Extra: Booster	+6 yards per instance of Booster
Extra: No Upward Limit	+2 yards per x2 mass capacity
Heavy target	−2 yards per x2 mass beyond 200 lbs (100 kg)
Light target	+2 yards per 1/2 mass below 100 lbs (50 kg)

Ranged Combat

The nasty thing about getting shot at is that once the bullet is in flight, there's not much you can do about it. Bullets are fast; people are slow. The first clue many people get that they're being shot at is the sensation of hot lead plowing through their flesh.

Gunfire is a static roll, and usually the target can't even attempt to avoid it with an opposed action. If you shoot, you either hit or you don't. Don't want to get shot? Get behind cover before the shooting starts. See page 76 for details.

To keep every fight from stagnating into endless repetitions of "I shoot him. I shoot him. I shoot him," there are various tactical options that skew your chances a bit. As always, these options must be chosen during the declare phase of combat, before you roll. Most of these rules can be used for any distance attack—be it a Stinger missile, a Harm [Fire Blast] Miracle, or a bow.

Special Maneuvers: Ranged Combat

You can declare one of these special actions instead of an ordinary attack. Attempting one of these moves causes you to lose a die from your dice pool before rolling.

You may attempt more than one special maneuver in the same action, but—unless the maneuver's description says otherwise—you can't use the same special maneuver more than once with a single action.

Called shot: Set one die to any value before rolling the rest. See below.

Determined shot: Ignore a botch result (page 22).

Fast shot: +1 width for speed or initiative purposes only.

Powerful shot: +1 width for damage purposes only (thrown weapon only).

Multiple actions: If you roll two sets, you may use each with a separate action. You can attempt more than one extra action by giving up additional dice. See page 27.

Suppressing fire: Force possible targets to keep their heads down. See page 73.

Aiming

By taking your time and sighting your target carefully, you can improve your chances of hitting. For every combat round spent squinting down the barrel at the target, add +1d to your dice pool. You can't take any other action while aiming, or add more than +2d in this fashion. And if you're distracted or injured while aiming (i.e., you have to roll some other dice pool, or you suffer any gobble dice), the bonus is lost.

In addition to normal aiming, shooting or attacking a large or stationary object at close range automatically grants a +2d bonus to the attack. After all, it's simple to shoot a house at 20 feet—much easier than shooting a gibbering alien that's spitting acid.

Called Shots

Sometimes you want to shoot a target in a specific body part. This is known as a called shot. It works pretty much the same as with hand-to-hand attacks, but at a distance.

There are three steps to making a called shot. First, drop 1d out of your dice pool. Second, take one of the dice in your pool and set it to the number of the hit location you're targeting. Third, roll the remaining dice and look for a match with the die that you set—if you match it, you hit that location.

If you manage a match without matching the chosen hit location, you still hit the target, just not in the right place.

Let's say you have a 6d Ranged Weapon (Pistol) dice pool and you're trying to shoot a criminal in

the right leg. Drop a die, leaving 5d in your pool, and place one of the dice at hit location 2—the right leg. The remaining 4d come up 4, 3, 3, and 1. You miss the right leg, but the 2x3 manages to hit the left arm.

Sometimes you want to call a shot at an object worn or held by a target, not the target itself—like the fuel tank on a flamethrower, a mystic amulet, gadget, or doomsday device. In that case, make a called shot for hit location 9.

Multiple Shots and Spray Attacks

Sometimes you fire more than one shot at someone (or at more than one person). With weapons designed to fire once per combat round (like many pistols or rifles) this is handled by the multiple actions rules (see **Multiple Actions** on page 27)—in other words, it's very hard to pull off.

Any firearm that doesn't have the Slow quality can be fired rapidly to gain a slightly better chance of hitting. This gives you a +1d bonus to your roll, but uses up a number of shots equal to your dice pool. You can get only a single hit this way—use only one set—but you can combine this with multiple actions and other special maneuvers.

Automatic weapons such as machine guns are built to make multiple attacks, and they have a large advantage—they have a Spray rating measured in dice that you add to your dice pool (see **Spray**, page 83). With a Spray weapon you don't lose the usual penalty die for attempting multiple actions. Any and all matches that come up are hits.

You can't combine a Spray attack with any special maneuvers, including aiming or other actions—if you spend a turn aiming and decide to use a weapon's Spray dice, the extra die from aiming is lost.

Spray attacks use a number of bullets (or energy charges, or whatever) equal to the number of dice in your pool (including the Spray rating); if your

Ranged Weapon + Spray pool is 9d, you shoot nine shots in a single combat round.

Automatic weapons are inaccurate at long range. A Spray weapon suffers a gobble die for its range penalty at long range, and TWO gobble dice at extreme range.

Usually you can attempt a Spray attack only against a single target or targets that are right next to each other. If they're spread out, you can attack one at a time or you can attempt suppressing fire.

Suppressing Fire

Suppressing fire means you're putting as much lead as possible (or laser power or whatever) in the general direction of a target. The intent of suppressing fire is to make the enemies keep their heads down (and more importantly, their guns), but a lucky hit is always possible. Most nonplayer characters use suppressing fire whenever possible, since it can prevent several enemies at a time from attacking.

Instead of the Ranged Weapon dice pool, roll a flat 2d plus your weapon's Spray rating. You can attempt a suppressing fire roll with any ranged weapon that doesn't have a Slow rating.

Each character in the targeted area who's not behind cover must roll a single die. If that die comes up the same as the height of one of your sets, that character is hit in the indicated hit location for normal damage.

In addition, every potential target must either seek cover the following round or make a Trauma Check (page 63). Once under cover they can act normally again, but until they find cover they must do their best to go to ground or else face the Stability roll.

Unless the GM says otherwise, suppressing fire empties a weapon's ammunition.

EXAMPLE: The vigilante Gunmetal unloads her machine gun (Spray 4d) in the direction of a dope-peddling street gang, using suppressing fire. She rolls 2d for suppressing fire

+ 4d Spray, for a total of 6d. Her dice come up 3x6. Each of the gangsters rolls 1d. One of them comes up 6, matching the height of Gunmetal's roll. So he takes a hit at width 3 to the left arm. The next round, all the gangsters must dive for cover or make Trauma Checks.

Sniping

Any time you shoot at someone who doesn't know he's going to be shot at, add +1d to your dice pool in addition to any other bonuses, including bonuses for aiming. That's one of the benefits of shooting at someone that isn't screaming, dodging, or firing back. The downside is that sniping is usually cold-blooded murder, and as such it triggers a Trauma Check.

Range

The default attack roll assumes short range. Because *Wild Talents* is abstract, "short range" covers a lot, and differs from weapon to weapon.

Weapon ranges are listed in yards. Short range is anything up to and including the listed range. Long range is more than the listed range. Extreme range is anything more than double the listed range.

Maximum range is usually unimportant—a miss is a miss—but for the record, most guns have an effective range of less than a mile.

For details on weapons and their effective ranges, see page 86.

The range to the target modifies the attacking dice pool:

Short range: Your dice pool is unaffected.

Long range: Reduce your pool by one die.

Extreme range: Reduce your roll by one gobble die.

Using Tactics

The Tactics Skill is a great way to simulate a team leader's ability to turn the tide of battle. Two common uses are ambushes and combat leadership.

Ambush

With proper time to scout the surroundings and find places to hide his team, the leader can make a Tactics roll to spring a surprise attack. This is a dynamic roll against the Tactics roll of the other side's leader.

If the ambushing leader wins, all characters on the ambushed side can't act in the first round. In the second round, each ambushed character must seek cover immediately or else make a Trauma Check. If it fails, it has the usual disastrous results (page 63). If it succeeds, the character can take whatever action he or she wants.

Combat Leadership

A smart, savvy leader can make any team more effective. The key is teamwork—the combat leadership bonus is available only for teams that train and fight together regularly. If in doubt, it's up to the GM.

Add the width of the leader's Tactics roll to teammates' Sense Stats for the declaration phase only, so they can declare later than usual. This bonus lasts width in rounds.

This is a regular combat action; doing anything else in the same round requires multiple actions.

Movement

Moving while making a ranged attack is an excellent way to not hit your target. If you move less than half your maximum speed, your dice pool takes one penalty die. If you move more than half your maximum speed, your roll takes one gobble die.

Throwing Large Objects

Throwing something heavy at an enemy is pretty simple. Roll Athletics to attack. You inflict damage based on your Body Stat just like a hand-to-hand attack, regardless of the size of the object. A character with 9d Body does width in Shock and Killing with a thrown rock or a thrown Dumpster; the Dumpster may be bigger than the rock, but it's a lot slower.

Throwing a large object has advantages. If it's big enough to cover more than one hit location of the target, you can hit with multiple sets in your roll even if you didn't declare multiple actions.

Also, each point of HAR on the object gives it a point of Penetration when used as a projectile.

So if you nail a thug with a Dumpster (HAR 1) and roll 2x7 and 3x10, he takes damage to the torso and the head and each hit is at Penetration 1!

Defense Rolls

Most people don't like being hit, stabbed, or strangled, and the attack rules assume the target is trying his or her best to avoid it while still trying to get an attack in. But there are some times when you don't care about attacking back—you just want to survive. Here's how "getting the hell out of the way" works in *Wild Talents*.

There are three ways to actively defend against an incoming attack: dodging, blocking or defending with a power.

Dodging uses the Dodge Skill. It applies against melee attacks and most ranged attacks.

Blocking uses the Block Skill. It applies primarily against melee attacks; you can use it to block ranged attacks only with GM approval.

Defending with a power requires the "Defends" Power Quality and uses the power's dice pool. For example, if your Create [Ice] power has the Defends quality you could block an incoming attack with a sheet of ice.

A defense roll is a combat action. To defend and attack in the same round requires multiple actions.

Defending is always an opposed roll (see page 28): Your dodge, block or power roll attempts to remove dice from the attacker's set or sets. Unlike a standard opposed roll, however, you can use gobble dice from a defense roll against more than one attacker, as long as your defense roll's width and height match or exceed the width and height of each attack.

For example, let's say two enemies attack you with sets of 2x4 and 2x7, and you defend with a 2x8. Your width matches that of the each set, and your height exceeds their heights, so you can gobble dice from both sets: Your two gobble dice remove one from each set, turning them both to misses.

If the attacks were 2x4 and 3x7, on the other hand, your 2x8 defense could disrupt the 2x4 but could not gobble any dice from the 3x7, because its width is greater than yours—that attack happens too quickly for you to defend against it.

What Can I Block and Dodge?

If you're out in the open, you can defend against any attack that you can see coming. Roughly speaking, this means hand-to-hand attacks, relatively slow projectiles, and most superpower attacks. If an attack is faster than an ordinary thrown object but slower than a bullet—a manhole cover thrown by a character with Hyperstat (Body), for instance—it's up to the GM.

You can use a defense roll to protect another target, if you're close enough that the attack could have hit you instead. If you block, it deflects the attack as usual; if you dodge, you can dodge into the

attack so it hits you instead (ouch). With a power, the result depends on the nature of the power.

Dodging Bullets

If someone shoots at you with a gun or some other weapon too fast for the eye to follow, your options are a little narrower. If there's some kind of cover nearby, and you know the attack is about to come, you can try to dive behind the cover for protection before your enemy takes the shot. This requires a Dodge roll, and the cover must be close enough for you to sprint to it in one round. Any further than that and you're out of luck; the shooter might take a penalty die because of your movement, but that's it.

If you dive for cover before the enemy fires—your width is greater, or else your width is the same but your height is greater—then you get behind cover before the attack happens. If the cover is thick enough, you might be safe.

If you have a power that might block bullets, you can roll it and hope for the same thing—that it activates before the gun fires.

There's no way to use Brawling or Melee Weapon to block an attack as fast as gunfire unless you have a shield or something that you can use for partial cover. If you're carrying a shield or something equivalent, you can roll Melee Weapon to bring it up and provide cover for some of your hit locations. See Shields, below.

The exception, of course, is a character with super-human reflexes and agility. If you have six or more Coordination dice, you can attempt to dodge or block even gunfire or laser beams: You're so agile that with a successful roll you can twitch out of the line of fire too quickly for the attacker to aim; you get to make a defense roll against any attack.

Blocking: Good News and Bad News

There's one disadvantage particular to blocking, and one advantage.

First, you can safely block an attack that does only Shock damage. If you block an attack that does Killing damage, however, you automatically take one point of Killing to your hand-held weapon, if you have one, or to one of your arms, your choice. If you block an



attack that does both Shock and Killing damage, you automatically take one point of Shock and one point of Killing. Unless you have armor on your arms, you're better off dodging deadly weapons or stopping them with a defensive power.

The advantage is that you can combine blocking with melee attacks easily. If you attempt multiple actions using block and a melee attack, you don't suffer penalty dice, but at least one of your rolled sets must be used to block. So if you have an 8d Body + Brawling pool and a 7d Body + Block pool and you want to both punch and block, you'd roll 7d: that's the smaller of the two dice pools, but you don't lose a die. If you roll only one set, you must use it to block. If you roll two sets, use one to block and the other to attack.

Shields

Shields help you block attacks, whether you're using a riot shield or a good old Viking round shield. If your Block roll succeeds, you get the usual benefits of blocking plus a little more: You can designate two or more hit locations to be covered by the shield for the rest of the round.

The number of hit locations covered depends on the size of the shield. A modern riot shield protects any four adjacent hit locations—arms, torso, and head, maybe; or torso, one arm and both legs. A medieval shield protects two or three adjacent hit locations. Any attack that hits a location covered by the shield must break through the shield's armor before it can damage you; most shields have LAR 2 or 3.

Minions and Mass Combat

Whether it's a gang of thugs or a platoon of trained soldiers, at some point you're going to have a lot of minor NPCs to handle, and not enough time to give them each a separate dice pool. We call those minor characters "minions." Each of them is a separate character with his or her own goals and sense of self-preservation, but they're not the major decision-makers of the game.

In the game, each group of minions gets its own single dice pool that represents the actions of all of them. Roll that one pool, and each set that comes up is a successful action by one of the minions.

What constitutes a group of minions is not too precise. It's about a dozen; probably no more than two dozen or fewer than half a dozen. If there are many more than that, split them up into two or more groups, each with its own dice pool.

Declarations and Dice Pools

A group of minions must declare one action each round. Minions always declare first in a combat round, regardless of their Sense Stats.

In the Roll phase, they roll 1d per minion, up to the usual limit of 10d.

In the Resolve phase, minions can use any and all sets that come up in their roll. The highest set must be used on the declared action. Extra sets can be used however the player running them—usually the GM—sees fit.

Why don't minions get more dice? Because people are not perfectly efficient. In any given round many of the minions are waiting for orders, taking stock of the situation, making a great show of aggression and action while keeping their heads down, yelling for help while hiding behind cover, reloading, being dazed or stunned, and so on. So they get 1d per minion, and that's it.

Minion Ratings

Before you use a group of minions in combat, you need to decide three important things about them: Their quality, their arms, and their armor. These are averages; you don't need to decide the quality and equipment of every single minion, just one overall rating that defines them as a group.

Quality: There are four quality ratings for minions: Rabble, Trained, Professional and Expert. Rabble are untrained civilians. Trained minions have a little training or experience; many soldiers, with a several months' training but only a few years in service, fall into this category.

Professional minions have a great deal of training and experience; they are reliable veterans. Expert minions have exceptional training and experience—they are SWAT team members and special forces.

Minion quality determines how easy it is to demoralize them (see **Attacking Minions**, below), and how hard it is to lead them (see **Leading Minions**, below). It also determines how well they do at skilled actions outside combat. Since minions are pretty abstract in play, one overall "quality" rating serves for all those qualities—minions who are well trained tend to have better morale and are usually more prompt to follow orders. If you want more detail in your minions you can separate Quality into distinct ratings.

Damage: You don't need many details about your minions' equipment. For weapons, they have three possibilities: Either they inflict width in Shock damage (using unarmed attacks, clubs, thrown rocks, whatever's at hand); or width in Killing damage (using knives, swords and other dangerous hand weapons, or bows or javelins in some settings); or width in Shock and Killing (using guns).

Armor: Most minions have no armor. If they have flak jackets or bulletproof vests, they're rated with LAR 1. If they have helmets and plate-reinforced jackets, they have LAR 2. Generally, minions have heavy armor only if they're in armored cars or tanks.

Minions Outside Combat

The usual minions rule—roll one die per minion—works fine for situations where numbers are an advantage, like combat, crowd control, guard duty, ditch-digging and shouting matches. They're great at blunt force. They do much worse when called upon to perform some tricky, skilled action, and worst of all when numbers are an impediment rather than an advantage.

When you call upon minions to perform with particular skill and numbers are an advantage—constructing a high-tech piece of machinery; canvassing a neighborhood to persuade and charm rather than intimidate; pursuing quarry through tough terrain; researching some obscure text—ap-

Minion Quality	Command	Skill	Demoralization
Rabble	Difficulty 8	Difficulty 10	Difficulty 2
Trained	Difficulty 6	Difficulty 8	Difficulty 4
Professional	Difficulty 4	Difficulty 6	Difficulty 6
Expert	Difficulty 2	Difficulty 3	Difficulty 8

Minion Damage Types

Width in Shock (fists, sticks, bricks)

Width in Killing (knives, swords, bayonets)

Width in Shock and Killing (guns)

Minion Armor Types

None

LAR 1 (light body armor)

LAR 2 (reinforced body armor)

ply the Skill Difficulty rating from their average quality. If the minions are rabble, they must roll height 10 to succeed; if they're expert they must roll height 4.

When minions have a task where numbers are an impediment or where numbers simply don't help—sneaking around; deciding on the right tactical course of action; interviewing or interrogating a single subject; jumping over a gap—minions automatically fail. They don't even get to roll.

If minions have powers—they have powered armor, maybe, or are all low-powered Talents—their powers work the same as Skills, with the Difficulty set by their quality.

Master Minions

There's one big exception to the rule that minions can't succeed where numbers are an impediment: expert minions with a particular area of special skill. If the minions are so good at a particular Skill that their numbers shouldn't count against them—ninjas and Stealth, for example—they have a "Mastery" with that Skill. Minions must be of expert quality in order to have a Mastery, but not all expert minions have one. It's up to the GM.

Instead of automatic failure, minions get an automatic success at the action where their Mastery applies. The width of the success is 2. The height of the success is 6 minus one for every five minions in the group (round down). If numbers bring the height to zero, they lose the automatic success and it becomes an automatic failure.

For example, if a gang of 15 ninjas (expert minions; Mastery: Stealth) is sneaking into an office building, their Stealth check is an automatic success with a height of 3 and a width of 2. If there are only seven of them, their Stealth height is 5 and its width is 2. With 30 ninjas, their Stealth height goes to zero and is no longer a success.

Sample Minions

You can add these to nearly any game.

Typical Thugs/Untrained Militia

Quality: Rabble

Difficulties: Command 8, Skill 10, Demoralization 2.

Damage: Shock (fists), Killing (knives), or Shock and Killing (guns)

Armor: None

Trained Soldiers

Quality: Trained

Difficulties: Command 6, Skill 8, Demoralization 4.

Damage: Shock and Killing (guns)

Armor: LAR 2

Police or Veteran Soldiers

Quality: Professional

Difficulties: Command 4, Skill 6, Demoralization 6.

Damage: Shock (fists, nightsticks, tasers) or Shock and Killing (guns)

Armor: LAR 1 or 2

Special Forces, Behind the Lines

Quality: Expert

Difficulties: Command 2, Skill 4, Demoralization 8.

Damage: Shock and Killing (guns)

Armor: None

Mastery: Stealth

Honest-to-God Ninjas!

Quality: Expert

Difficulties: Command 2, Skill 4, Demoralization 8.

Damage: Killing (poison darts, spears, bows, knives, swords, and deadly ninjitsu)

Armor: None

Mastery: Stealth

Minions and Extended Contests

Use the “Minions Outside Combat” rules for minions in extended contests. Obstacles, however, tend to slow minions down even more than they impede individual characters. Any time a group of minions attempts to overcome an obstacle and fails to match or beat its Difficulty, they lose that Difficulty rating in minions from the group. If a group of 10 minions tries to overcome a Difficulty 3 obstacle and fails, they lose three minions and have seven left.

If the minions choose not to try to overcome the obstacle—they sit out that turn to avoid it—they lose none of their number.

Minion Attacks

Minions can attempt the same actions as other characters. They can attack, they can wrestle and restrain, they can even dive for cover. Minions facing superheroes or supervillains love to take cover.

Minions with firearms always use suppressing fire. Individual NPCs with guns may use either direct fire or suppressing fire, of course, but minions use suppressing fire—it’s likely to make the enemy take cover and stop shooting back, after all.

If a group of minions use a defense roll, it applies to any attack on a minion in that group; the minions don’t have to declare that one particular minion is getting the benefit of the defense.

All the usual dice penalties and effects apply to a minion dice pool: For example, any attack on a gang of minions that inflicts damage removes a die from the gang’s highest set as they pause, stumble, or back away in fear.

Attacking Minions

Don’t keep track of damage on minions. They have exactly two states: Either a minion is in the fight, or he’s out of commission.

An attack on a minion that does three or more points of Shock damage past armor, or any Killing

damage past armor, or any damage to hit location 10 past armor, takes the minion out of commission.

“Out of commission” can mean whatever the GM thinks it should mean: Maybe the minion is knocked out, or huddled in a ball cradling his hurt leg, or running for cover after a near miss, or maybe—if the attack did Killing damage—badly hurt or even killed.

In addition, any time you take one minion down there’s a chance other minions decide they’ve had enough. An attack on minions has a demoralization Difficulty rating based on their average quality. If you do enough damage to take the target out of commission, and your attack roll beats the demoralization Difficulty, instead of affecting just that one minion it takes width in minions out of commission: The one you attacked and others who flee or go to cover and stop attacking.

If the attack roll is a success but does not beat the demoralization Difficulty, it affects just the one minion.

Finally, when more than half of the minions in a group are out of commission, the rest automatically flee.

EXAMPLE: More than a dozen thugs armed with knives and lead pipes attack the superhero Old Glory. Old Glory lays into them with his antique saber, attempting multiple actions, and between that and his Lucky Strike power he gets three sets of 2x5. The thugs are rated as “Trained,” so the Difficulty against them is 4, which Old Glory’s attacks beat at height 5. That means each of his attacks takes width in thugs out of commission, half hurt or killed and half running for it. Old Glory’s sword slashes and flashes, and in a single round three thugs fall and three more turn and run.

Minions and Stability

If minions are faced with a Trauma Check, they roll it as a skilled action: Roll 1d per minion with their Skill Difficulty rating as the Difficulty. If they get no matches, they fall apart and run for the hills in a panic, one and all; every last one of them is considered out of commission. The only way around this is if they have a leader who immediately succeeds with a Prevent Rout action (see Leading Minions, below).

If the minions get even one success, however, they all keep performing normally. Minions, like men fighting together in any group, can hold each other up in the face of terrific danger.

Leading Minions

The leader of a group of minions can act on his or her own, or attempt to improve the minions' performance (or both, with multiple actions). One leader can be in charge of multiple groups of minions, but each group requires a separate action by the leader to command them. To give more than one order, or orders to more than one group of minions, requires multiple actions.

The Difficulty of a command action depends on the minions' quality.

Here are some common commands, with the Skill rolls they require.

Combat Leadership: Leadership Skill. Add width in dice to the minions' dice pool for one round.

Prevent Rout: Leadership or Tactics Skill. Prevents the minions from fleeing after half of them are out of commission or after they suffer a failed Trauma Check.

Rally: Leadership Skill. Return width in minions who are out of commission back to the fight.

Seize Initiative: Tactics Skill. Next round, the minions declare their actions at the same time as their leader.

Surprise Attack: Tactics Skill, in a contest with the best Tactics Skill among the enemies (if in doubt, the GM decides). At the beginning of combat, the minions get one round to act in which the enemy can take no actions. Any successful attack on the enemy counts as suppressing fire, forcing each enemy to either seek cover or make a Trauma Check. A surprise attack is not an option after combat has begun.

Sergeants and Officers

One overall leader can issue instructions to multiple subordinate leaders, each of whom can command one group of minions, if you have that many minions and good enough organization and communications. The overall leader tells the subordinate what to do, and the subordinate makes the roll to lead the group of minions.

Issuing an instruction to a subordinate leader takes one combat round, but it doesn't require a roll unless the GM feels the subordinate leader has some reason to balk at the orders, such as being poorly trained or facing impossible or suicidal orders.

In the modern military, leaders of individual groups of minions are typically noncommissioned officers such as sergeants and corporals, while the overall leaders who command the NCOs are officers such as lieutenants and captains. Higher-ranking officers then tell the lieutenants and captains what to do.

Danger! Danger!

With a little creativity, you can use the rules for minions for a wide range of threats. If the player characters are in a danger room loaded with deadly robots and traps, or a raging volcano with lava and spitting rocks, or a deadly swamp with snakes and alligators, give the whole place a 10d roll just like a gang of minions to represent its threats and challenges. Maybe it attacks, or maybe it tries to block

a character's action, or tries to immobilize one, or what have you.

You can do the same thing with a robot factory gone berserk, a burning building, or a treacherous swamp, any treacherous environment that seems to actively oppose whatever the heroes are trying to do. Set the damage rating and decide whether the hostile environment is tough enough to have an armor rating, and you're set.

Weapons and Objects

Wild Talents abstracts the properties of equipment, armor, and weapons into a number of qualities—general concepts that define the game effects of the object or device—such as Heavy Armor, Light Armor, Penetration, Area, Burn, Slow, and Spray. We discussed armor on page 64; here's how *Wild Talents* handle weapons and objects.

Weapon Qualities

Most weapons do damage in the ordinary way—you attack with a Skill roll and the weapon does width in Shock damage, or width in Killing damage, or both.

But some weapons do more damage than others, and some have special properties, like being able to penetrate armor or exploding over a certain radius. Weapon qualities define what a special weapon can do: Area, Burn, Daze, Penetration, Slow and Spray.

Area

A weapon with the Area quality explodes when it hits, inflicting extra damage to the target and everything within a 10-yard radius. (At the GM's discretion, the radius for a particular explosive may be larger than 10 yards.)

The Area quality is measured in dice. The specific target of the attack takes the normal weapon damage. In addition, the target and every character within the radius takes 2 Shock to every hit location.

Finally, the target and every character in the radius rolls a number of dice equal to the weapon's Area rating during the resolve phase of combat. Each die indicates a hit location that suffers 1 point of Killing. Don't look for sets here—just take the damage from each die on the appropriate hit location.

Sample Weapon	Area Dice
Stick of dynamite	2d
Hand grenade	3d
Light antitank rocket	4d
Rocket-propelled grenade	5d
Tank cannon	7d
Heavy antitank rocket	9d
Artillery shell	10d
Low-yield neutron bomb	10hd
10-megaton nuclear blast	20hd

EXAMPLE: The Red Scare is caught in an Area 3 explosion. He suffers 2 Shock to each hit location, and rolls a 1, 3, and 10 on the three Area dice. He takes 1 point of Killing damage each to his right leg (location 1), right arm (location 3), and head (location 10).

If the initial attack misses, the Area dice don't get rolled at all—the attack goes wide and explodes harmlessly.

What if you're in the Area attack's radius and you don't want to get blown up? Well, your options are limited.

If you declared a movement action of some kind, and it happens before the explosion, and you move far enough, you might wind up outside the radius.

Otherwise, you can attempt a "Diving for Cover" roll using Dodge. You still must declare it and it still must succeed before the explosion. If you succeed, reduce the explosion's Killing damage by the width of your roll.

If the attacker declares the Area attack after you already declared your action, and you didn't happen to declare "Diving for Cover," I'm afraid you're out of luck.

If you're the GM and a bunch of NPCs get caught in an Area blast, you may want to roll the dice just once and apply the same results to every character. This means that they all take the same damage to the same hit locations, which is unrealistic—but it's a lot easier than rolling 3d over and over for each NPC.

Burn

The Burn quality has no points or dice pool associated with it—it simply takes effect. Targets damaged by a Burn weapon are on fire.

When a Burn weapon strikes, it does normal damage. In addition, every hit location of the target except the head is now on fire and takes 1 point of Shock damage.

Burning hit locations suffer an additional point of Shock damage each round until the fire is extinguished. Typically, only full immersion or lack of oxygen will do it—most fire-based military weapons use a sticky fuel that is particularly difficult to extinguish.

Any target set on fire must make a Trauma Check once per round to avoid panicking. A target that panics may do nothing except run around swatting at the flames.

The Burn quality can also be used to simulate other threats that stick with you, such as acid or even a swarm of insects. Just describe it differently.

Daze

There are many "less than lethal" weapons out there designed to incapacitate without killing. Sensory or nerve impulse attacks—such as a flashbang grenade or an electrical stunner—overwhelm the target's nervous system, inflicting width in penalty dice on all the target's dice pools. The effect lasts

width in rounds. Chemical attacks such as tear gas or pepper spray have the same effect, but it lasts width in minutes.

At the GM's discretion, a Daze effect can be resisted with an Endurance roll, or may only take effect if the attack damages the target.

Penetration

Penetrating weapons are designed to pierce armor. Their effectiveness is measured in points. They reduce both the HAR and LAR of a target by their Penetration rating before applying damage, for that attack only. (However, if a penetrating weapon is explosive—it has an Area rating—and reduces the armor rating of an object or armor to zero, it eliminates that object's or hit location's armor rating permanently.)

Slow

A weapon with the Slow quality can't be fired every combat round. Instead you must spend a number of rounds equal to its Slow rating to prepare it before you can fire again. Most modern weapons require a single combat round to reload all ammunition, then you must spend the Slow rating in rounds preparing to fire.

Spray

Spray weapons are designed to fire very rapidly and "spray" an area with bullets or blasts—they are fully automatic or possess some other factor making it easy to fire at many targets at once. A shotgun firing dozens of pellets and a machine gun spraying hundreds of bullets per minute are both Spray weapons. The key difference is their performance in suppressing fire. A fully automatic weapon like a machine gun adds its Spray rating to the suppressing fire dice pool; a manual or semi-automatic Spray weapon like a shotgun does not. (A fully automatic weapon should get about one Spray die per 300 rounds per minute firing speed.)



Spray weapons can make multiple attacks (see page 27) with no dice-pool penalty. Instead, add the weapon's Spray dice to the dice pool for the attack roll. Each set is a successful hit by the weapon, inflicting normal damage.

If you are performing multiple actions (firing while diving for cover, for instance), you still roll the lower of the two dice pools, but don't suffer the normal multiple actions penalty.

Most Spray weapons fire a number of bullets each round equal to the number of dice rolled, including Spray dice. (The exception is a weapon like a shotgun that gains a Spray rating for individual shots.)

Most Spray weapons can either be fired as single-shot weapons or as Spray weapons; unless the weapon description says otherwise, you can choose (in the declaration phase of each round) how much of the Spray rating to use in each attack.

Basic Weapons

Weapons do different amounts as well as different types of damage. Some weapons cause only Shock, some only Killing, and some a combination of both. All are based off the width of the attack roll. Damage is listed in shorthand: Width+1 in Shock and Killing is W+1 in SK. Width in Shock + 1 Killing is W in S+1K. Got it?

Advanced Firearms

The basic weapons chart is abstract—a rifle is pretty much a rifle, a pistol a pistol. Not all guns are the same, however, and even two weapons of the same type (such as two different types of machine guns) may be more or less effective in combat. If you're interested in more realism and detail, use the advanced weapons charts.

First find the weapon type's base damage on the basic weapons chart, then find the ammunition type (see **Firearms and Rockets**, page 86) for modifiers.

Basic Weapons

Weapon	Damage (and Qualities)
Fists and feet	W in S
Taser	W in S + Daze
Club, brass knuckles	W+1 in S
Baseball bat	W+2 in S
Knife, shovel	W in S + 1 K
Piano wire	As strangling (page 70) but damage is Killing
Large knife	W in K
Axe, spear, sword	W+1 in K
Compound bow	W+1 in K
Pistol	W in SK
Submachine gun	W in SK (Spray 3)
Shotgun	W+1 in SK (Spray 3)
Carbine	W+1 in SK
Rifle	W+2 in SK
Assault rifle	W+2 in SK (Spray 4)
Machine gun	W+2 in SK (Spray 5)
Laser pistol	W+2 in K (Penetration 2)
Plasma pistol	W+1 in SK (Burn, Penetration 1)
Hand grenade	W+1 in SK (Area 3, Penetration 2)
Rocket-propelled grenade	W+1 in SK (Area 5, Penetration 3)
Tank cannon	W+6 in SK (Burn, Area 7, Penetration 5)
Field artillery	W+7 in SK (Burn, Area 10, Penetration 6)
Bunker-buster bomb	W+10 in SK (Burn, Area 10, Penetration 7)

Advanced Ammo Qualities

Cartridge	Damage
Rifles, Machine Guns and Shotguns	
.30 inch (7.62 mm)	+1K
7.62 Soviet	+0
5.56 mm NATO	+0
.50 AP (12.7 mm)	+1K (Pen. 1)
.50 BMG	+2K
10 gauge slug	+2K
10 gauge shot	+1K (Spray 1)
12 gauge slug	+1K
12 gauge shot	+0 (Spray 2)

Advanced Ammo Qualities

Cartridge	Damage
Pistols and Submachine Guns	
.22 or .25 inch	-1K
.32 ACP or 9mm	+0
.38 special	+1K
9mm parabellum	+1K
.40 inch or 10mm	+2K
.45 ACP	+1SK
.357 magnum	+2K
.44 magnum	+2K
.50 AE	+2SK

Firearms and Rockets

Weapon	Ammo	Capacity	Weight	Range	Spray
Pistols (Base Damage: W in SK)					
Glock-17 9mm pistol	9mm parabellum	17	2.75 lbs	25 yards	
.45 M1911A pistol	.45 ACP	7	2.5 lbs	20 yards	
Smith and Wesson revolver	.38 special	6	2.5 lbs	20 yards	
"Bulldog" .44 police revolver	.44 magnum	6	2.5 lbs	25 yards	
.357 magnum revolver	.357 magnum	5	2.25 lbs	25 yards	
Desert Eagle .50 pistol	.50 AE	7	3.75 lbs	25 yards	
Smith & Wesson .22 pistol	.22	10	1.5 lbs	20 yards	
Rifles (Base Damage: W+2 in SK)					
H&K PSG-1 sniper rifle	7.62mm NATO	20	16.25 lbs	500 yards	
Barrett M82A1 .50 BMG rifle	.50 BMG	10	28.75 lbs	900 yards	
Winchester .30-06 rifle	.30	5	10 lbs	200 yards	
Shotguns (Base Damage: W+1 in SK)					
10-gauge shotgun	10 gauge	5	10.5 lbs	15 yards	
12-gauge shotgun	12 gauge	8	9.95 lbs	15 yards	
Fully automatic shotgun	12 gauge	20	16 lbs	15 yards	1d
Submachine Guns (Base Damage: W in SK)					
Heckler & Koch MP5	9mm parabellum	30	6.47 lbs	50 yards	4d
Uzi	9mm parabellum	30	7.7 lbs	50 yards	3d
Ingram MAC 10	9mm parabellum	30	6.28 lbs	25 yards	4d
Ingram MAC 11	.32 ACP	32	3.5 lbs	15 yards	5d
Skorpion machine pistol	.32 ACP	20	2.86 lbs	15 yards	3d
Assault Rifles (Base Damage: W+2 in SK + Spray)					
M-4 carbine	5.56mm NATO	30	6.9 lbs	100 yards	4d
AK-47	7.62mm Soviet	30	10 lbs	200 yards	3d
M-14	7.62mm NATO	20	11 lbs	250 yards	0d
Machine Guns (Base Damage: W+2 in SK + Spray)					
M-249 SAW	5.56mm NATO	200	16.3 lbs	400 yards	4d
M-240B	7.62mm NATO	100	27.6 lbs	500 yards	4d
Minigun	7.62mm NATO	1,500	82 lbs	300 yards	8d+1wd
Explosive Weapons (Base Damage: W+1 in SK + Area)					
Dragon weapon system		1	33.9 lbs	500 yards	
<i>Penetration 5, Area 9, Slow 3</i>					
Light antitank weapon		1	5.5 lbs	100 yards	
<i>Penetration 4, Area 4</i>					

Sample Objects	Hit Locations	Wound Boxes per Location	Armor	Weight
Nightstick	1	2	LAR 1	2 lbs
Baseball bat	1	4	LAR 2	3 lbs
Knife	1	3	HAR 1	1 lb
Staff	1	4	LAR 2	3 lbs
Sword	1	4	HAR 1	3 lbs
Pistol	1	5	HAR 1	6 lbs
Rifle	1	6	HAR 1	10 lbs
Bicycle	1	3	LAR 2	22 lbs
Small car	4	4	LAR 3	2 tons
Small truck or minivan	4	5	LAR 3	4 tons
Helicopter	5	5	LAR 3	4.2 tons
City bus	6	6	LAR 3	8 tons
Tanker truck	7	6	LAR 3	12 tons
Subway car	6	6	LAR 3	13 tons
Fighter jet	6	5	LAR 4	18 tons
Medium-size house	10	4	LAR 2	30 tons
M1 tank	6	10	HAR 5	50 tons
Jumbo jet	10	5	LAR 4	400 tons

Armor or Barrier	Protection
Full body padding	LAR 1
1" wood door	LAR 2
Kevlar vest, Class I	LAR 2
Kevlar vest, Class II	LAR 3
Car door	LAR 3
Riot helmet	LAR 3
6" wood wall	LAR 4
Medieval plate mail	LAR 4
Kevlar vest with 1/4" steel plate, Class III	LAR 4
Kevlar vest with 1/2" steel plate, Class IV	HAR 1
2" concrete wall	HAR 1
12" wood wall	HAR 1
.25" aluminum	HAR 1
Car wheel well	HAR 1

Armor or Barrier	Protection
Bulletproof glass	HAR 1
1' sandbags	HAR 2
8" concrete wall	HAR 3
.25" titanium	HAR 2
1" steel plate	HAR 2
2" steel plate	HAR 3
Light tank armor	HAR 3
4" steel plate	HAR 4
Heavy tank armor	HAR 5
10' earth	HAR 5
10' concrete bunker	HAR 7
16" steel vault door	HAR 6
3' steel vault door	HAR 7
The Hoover Dam	HAR 8
Neutron star	HAR 10 (hardened)

Damaging Objects

What happens when you inflict damage on an inanimate object such as a pistol, house, helicopter, or aircraft carrier? How much damage can an object suffer before it's inoperable or destroyed? Good question.

Objects in *Wild Talents* have wound boxes, just like people have wound boxes, representing how much punishment they can stand before they're destroyed.

Just like characters, damage beyond the object's armor rating fills up its wound boxes with Shock or Killing damage. When an object's boxes are filled with Shock damage, it's inoperable (or that location of the object is inoperable). If it's a computer, for example, it's broken; if it's a room of a house, it's uninhabitable.

Once an object is filled with Killing damage, it's demolished beyond repair.

Particularly tough objects have HAR. Less-durable objects have LAR, but light armor works slightly differently for objects than it does for characters. On an object, remove all the Shock damage entirely—don't leave one leftover point—before converting the LAR in Killing damage to Shock.

Very large objects like vehicles and structures have multiple hit locations, each with its own wound boxes ("tires," "engine," "passenger cab," and so on). It's up to the GM to assign hit locations, and to decide whether each location has the full armor rating of an object, as well as what happens to it when a location is damaged or destroyed. Damage to an engine or motor probably disables the vehicle; damage to a crew, passenger or cargo compartment may cause damage to occupants instead of damaging vehicle wound boxes.

Generally you should give an object an HAR or LAR rating based on its material, and five wound boxes per hit location, unless a hit location is particularly small or fragile.

In the case of a very thick barrier like a bunker wall, each location represents a section of the wall's thickness. For any thickness up to one yard (one meter), just use the barrier's heavy armor rating; for anything beyond that HAR breaks through the barrier and damages whatever is on the other side. If the barrier is thicker than that, give it the same HAR plus ten wound boxes per yard or meter of thickness.

Blowing Things Up

Area weapons are particularly good at destroying structures and vehicles. When an Area weapon scores a hit on a vehicle or structure and does damage past its armor, all Area dice are focused on that specific hit location, not rolled normally.

Environmental Threats

Combat is not the only threat to your well being. Want to know what happens when your character freezes, drowns, is electrocuted, falls or gets poisoned? You came to the right place.

Impact

There are all kinds of ways to slam into things, and none of them are fun. Since they are all pretty similar, the same rules cover falling and smashing into something.

First, you automatically take 2 Shock to every hit location.

In addition, impact does damage based on your speed (or, say, the speed of the jet smashing into your face). For each increment of speed (see the chart), you suffer one point of damage to each and every hit location. If you run into something hard, like the ground, it's Killing. The damage is Shock if you run into something soft like water or padding, or are strapped into a vehicle (or are in the back seat) when it crashes. If you're strapped in securely and you run into something soft, it's all Shock and you take half damage.

Damage	Impact Speed	Falling Distance
1	2 mph	1 yard
2	5 mph	2 yards
3	10 mph	4 yards
4	20 mph	8 yards
5	40 mph	15 yards
6	80 mph	50 yards
7	160 mph	80 yards
8	320 mph	100+ yards
9	640 mph	
10	1,280 mph	

And so on.

Terminal velocity in Earth's atmosphere is about 120 miles per hour with a partially-opened parachute, up to about 200 miles per hour without aid. The speed of sound at sea level is about 760 miles per hour. A speeding bullet goes from 800 miles per hour (a medium-sized pistol round) up to 2,000 miles per hour.

Reducing Impact Damage

Some Skills and powers help reduce impact damage. If you see it coming you get a single dice pool roll with a relevant Skill or power (at the GM's discretion) as a defense against the damage. Some relevant Skills include Dodge, Athletics and Endurance. This is an instinctive reaction, so in combat it doesn't require a declaration.

A successful roll has three benefits.

First, reduce the Killing damage on each hit location by the width of your roll. (Reduce the Shock if it's a "soft" impact.)

Second, you can "move" width in the remaining Killing (or Shock) damage from one location to another. This is a good way to protect your head.

Third, if you're falling (at least one leg must take Killing damage from the fall), you can land on your feet and subtract your jumping distance (as determined by your Body Stat) from your impact speed

to determine how much damage you take. (One yard per round is equal to one mile per hour.) If you land on your feet and your jumping distance is greater than your speed in yards per round, you suffer no damage at all—not even the 2 Shock per location.

Vehicular Crashes

If you're in a crashing vehicle, your options are more limited. The only Skill you can use to reduce the damage is Endurance. You just don't have enough mobility to use Dodge or Athletics to position your body properly for the impact. (If it's such a large vehicle that you can get up and walk around, of course, this does not apply.)

If there's a vehicle hit location between you and the impact (an engine block in a head-on collision, for instance) and that location is filled with Killing damage by the impact, you take full impact damage as well. If that location is not filled with Killing damage, you take half damage from the impact.

Armor and Impacts

If you're wearing personal armor (or you have an armor power) it protects against impact damage, including falling and crashes.

On each location protected by light armor, reduce all Shock damage to one point of Shock and then convert the LAR in Killing damage to Shock.

On each location protected by heavy armor, reduce all Shock damage to one point of Shock and then reduce the Killing damage by the HAR.

EXAMPLE: The vigilante Gunmetal blows the tires off the speeding getaway car of three bank robbers, causing it to swerve off the road and smash into a wall at 40 miles per hour. The robbers are wearing no seat belts, and they disabled the air bags so they could get out faster in a pinch, so the ones in front take take 2 Shock and 5 Killing to each hit

location from the impact. The one in the back seat takes 2 Shock and 5 more Shock from the speed, or 7 Shock to each hit location.

They each get Endurance rolls to try to reduce the damage, and they roll 9, 8 and 1; 8, 1 and 1; and (in the back seat) 9, 3 and 1. The first robber, who failed the roll, is dead; 2 Shock and 5 Killing to the head alone is lethal.

The other robber in the front, who made the roll with 2x1, reduces the damage by 2 Killing on each hit location and can move 2 Killing to a different location. He moves 2 Killing from his head to his torso. He takes 2 Shock and 1 Killing to his head, 2 Shock and 5 Killing to his torso, and 2 Shock and 3 Killing everywhere else. He's conscious but has broken bones everywhere.

The robber in back takes 7 Shock to each hit location, which leaves him unconscious and barely alive—his head has three boxes filled with Killing and the fourth filled with Shock. Wear your seat belts, kids!

Cold

Extended exposure to cold can be lethal. The rate at which you take damage from cold weather depends on how prepared you are and how cold it is; but if you're trapped in extreme cold without cold-weather gear, you probably won't last long.

There are two ratings for cold—freezing (32° to 0° F), and sub-zero (below 0° F).

For each time interval in either type of cold, suffer 1 Shock to each arm and leg. That's not so bad—but you can't recover this damage until you find some source of warmth. If you find warmth before the next time interval passes, spending 10 minutes at a source of heat will shake off any Shock damage caused by cold. If not, it's real damage and remains there until healed normally.

When your limbs fill with Shock, you begin taking Shock to your torso and head and keep taking damage to your limbs, turning the Shock there to Killing.

In freezing cold, you can act normally without a successful Endurance roll for the time interval. After that, you must rest at a heat source or begin suffering damage.

Sub-zero cold is much less forgiving: You must make a successful Endurance roll to do anything longer than one minute (ordinary clothes), one hour (cold-weather gear), or one day (unheated shelter) before returning to a heat source. If you fail the roll, you can do nothing but rest for an entire time interval, suffering appropriate damage all the time. Then you get to roll again.

That's not all: Every night you spend in a sub-zero environment without access to warmth—even in an unheated shelter—you lose half your Willpower.

Shelter	Interval (Freezing)	Interval (Sub-Zero)
Ordinary clothes	Body in minutes	Width in minutes
Cold-weather gear	Body in hours	Width in hours
Unheated shelter	Body in days	Width in days
Wet	Drop a time interval	Drop a time interval

Suffocation and Drowning

You can hold your breath for a number of minutes equal to your Body Stat. You can extend that with an Endurance roll by the width of the roll in minutes.

After this grace period, you must roll Endurance each round to avoid taking damage, and you lose a die from your Endurance dice pool for each round after the first. When you fail the roll, you begin to suffocate.

Each round of suffocation damage inflicts one point of Killing damage to your torso and one point of Shock to your head.

When your head fills with Shock damage you pass out. When your head or torso fills with Killing damage you're dead.

Ordinarily you stop taking damage as soon as you start breathing again.

Drowning is a special case, however, because once you inhale water it doesn't do you any good to come up for air—the water's still in there. You keep taking damage until someone succeeds with a First Aid roll to get the water out of your system and resuscitate you.

Electrocution

Electrical hazards have a dice pool representing their danger, rated from 1d to 10d. When you're zapped, roll the electric dice pool. If a match comes up, you suffer width in Shock damage. However, the hit location is determined not by the height of the roll but by the circumstance of the electrical attack. If you're poking at wires with a stick, the Shock starts in your arm. If you're hit by lightning, it starts in the highest point of your body (usually your head).

Electrical damage doesn't stay in one place, though. It starts wherever it made contact and goes to the ground by the shortest route. Grab both ends of a live wire with one hand and you only take damage in that one arm. Grab an end in each hand, and the jolt travels from one hand, through the torso, and out the other arm, doing the same damage to all three locations. If you're hit by lightning, it goes straight down your head, through your torso and out one or both legs. (This is why lightning victims sometimes have their shoes blown off.)

That's what happens with a one-time shock, such as getting hit by a bolt of lightning or sticking your finger in a light socket and blowing the circuit breaker. It does damage, you go "Ouch!" and that's it.

If it's a steady current, that's a bit nastier—it can lock your muscles so you stick around and keep taking damage. You have to make an Endurance roll in a contest with the electricity dice pool to let go. If you fail, your muscles lock up and you get juiced again the next round. This happens each round until you make your Endurance roll, someone knocks you free, or you die.

Poison

Poisons are substances that cause illness, injury, or death if ingested, injected, inhaled or if the victim suffers prolonged exposure to them. Every poison is different, but their effects are similar. They all make your body shut down, which means lots of damage.

Each deadly substance has an onset time and either a dice pool value or a flat damage value.

Biological or chemical poisons have a damage rating for a lethal dose of the toxin—the amount consistently lethal to humans—and the specific hit location that it affects.

Radiation poisoning works much like chemical and biological toxins, but a radiation source has a dice pool that inflicts width in Shock damage to the head (For game purposes the damage affects only the head.) Symptoms of radiation poisoning include weakness, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhea.

When poisoned, make an Endurance roll. Reduce the poison's Shock and Killing damage by the width of your roll. If the poison is radiation, your roll must beat the height and width of the radiation dice pool's roll.

If you're continuously exposed—trapped in a room filled with poison gas, for instance—you suffer the poison's effects once every 10 rounds.

Chronic exposure to a toxin—exposure to non-lethal levels over a long period of time—usually has long-term effects that aren't measured immediately in the game; their effects are up to the GM.

Chronic radiation poisoning generally causes no direct damage, but produces long-term consequences such as increased risk of cancer and birth defects. The exact effects, again, are up to the GM.

Optional Rule: Four-Color Radiation

In comic books, radiation almost never has lasting effects. At best it causes the spontaneous development of superpowers; at worst it temporarily cripples. Either way, it's rare for a hero to be stopped by exposure that in the real world would end with a funeral.

If you want radiation poisoning more compatible with the world of the four-color comic book, it may cause immediate damage but has no lasting health effects on heroes unless the GM says it's important to the story—and it can cause the spontaneous development of superpowers in characters with the Mutant Archetype (see page 103) and others whose abilities are derived from such sources. (See **New Powers and New Meta-Qualities** on page 58 for details.)

Other Threats

You can use these guidelines to create any other kind of environmental threat in *Wild Talents*. Assign values to several categories to define the severity of the threat, the damage it inflicts, and the way a victim can reduce that damage.

Threat Severity

Threat Severity indicates how likely the victim is to take damage, and how often the victim might take damage. At each time increment—from once per round to once per day—roll the threat's dice pool. If the roll succeeds, the victim takes damage. Most threat dice pools use normal dice, but a particularly insidious threat, such as radiation, might use Hard Dice.

Damage

The Damage ratings determine how much damage the victim takes, what kind of damage it is, and which hit locations take that damage. Particularly dangerous threats might have a Penetration rating as well or other special “weapon” qualities.

Defense

The threat's Defense indicates which Skill a character can use to avoid or reduce the threat's damage by rolling to oppose the threat's dice pool. A



character with a power that seems like it ought to serve the same purpose as the listed defense can roll that power's dice pool instead. The most common defenses are Athletics, Dodge, Endurance, Perception and Stability.

Example: House Fire

Here's a sample threat—a raging house fire.

Threat Severity: 4d, each round

Damage: Width in Shock to one hit location

Defense: Dodge

Biological and Chemical Toxins

Toxin (Lethal Dose)	Delivery	Damage	Affected Location	Onset
Potassium cyanide (200 mg)	Inj./Ing.	5 SK	Head	5 minutes
Fugu venom (2 mg)	Ing.	5 SK	Head	5 rounds
Sarin gas (35 mg)	Inh.	7 SK	Torso	7 hours
Arsenic (40 mg)	Ing.	7 SK	Torso	7 hours
Cobra venom (18-45 mg)	Inj.	7 SK	Torso	7 rounds
Mustard gas (3-6 g)	Inh.	8 SK	Torso	8 rounds
Botulism (0.005 mg)	Inj./Ing.	8 SK	Torso	8 hours
Hemlock (100 mg)	Ing.	8 SK	Torso	8 minutes
Phosphene gas (3 g)	Inh.	8 SK	Torso	8 minutes
Ricin powder (0.005 mg)	Inh./Inj.	9 SK	Torso	1 day
Phosgene gas (3 g)	Inh.	9 SK	Torso	9 hours
Hydrogen cyanide gas (50 mg)	Inh.	10 SK	Torso	10 minutes

Radiation Poisoning

Radiation (Dice Pool)	Delivery	Penetration	Damage Type	Onset
Gamma (1hd to 10hd)	Exposure	10	Shock	Instant
X-ray (1hd to 5hd)	Exposure	10	Shock	Instant
Neutrons (5hd to 10hd)	Exposure	5	Shock	Instant

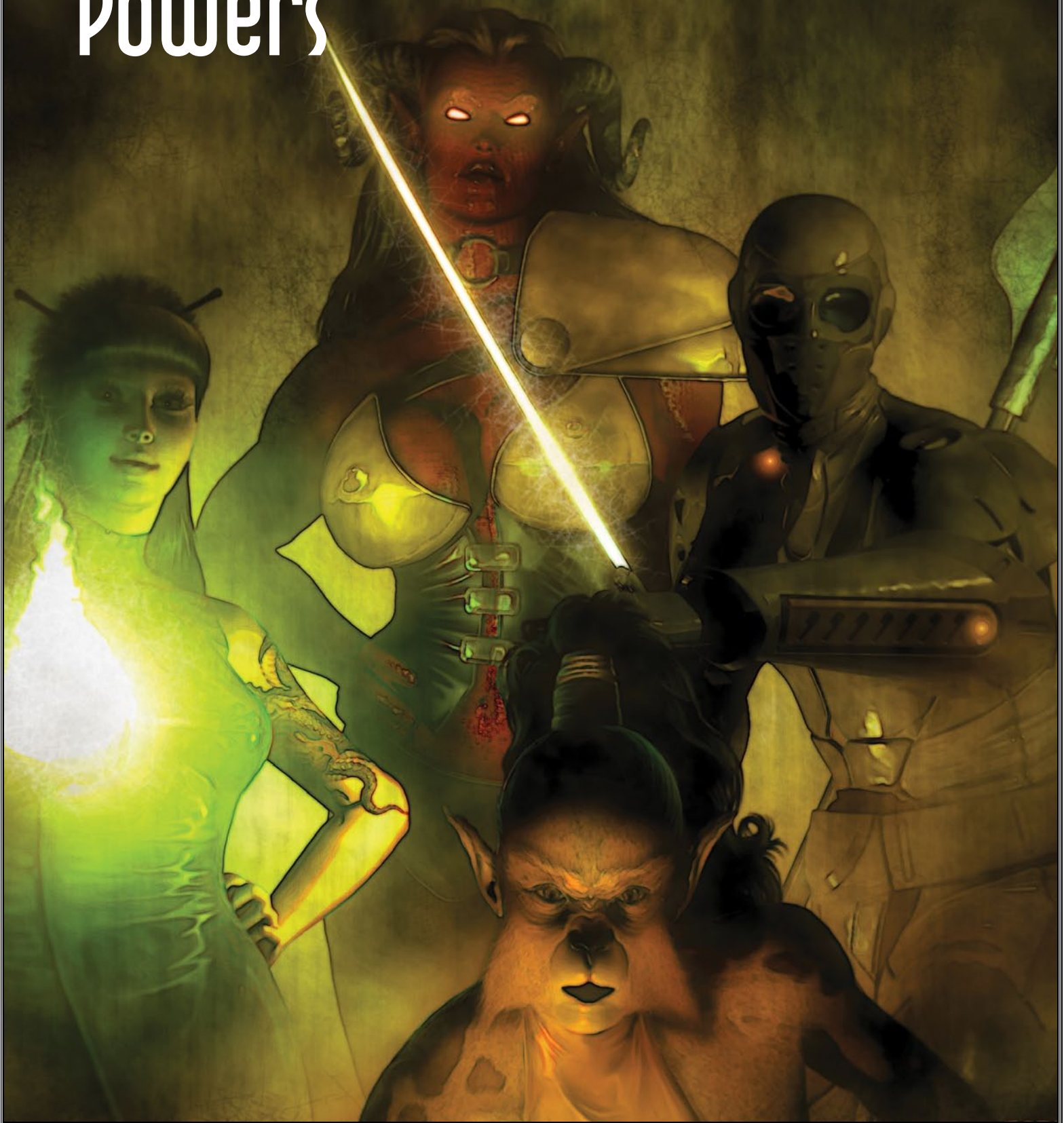
Other Threat Severity and Damage

Time Increments	Dice Pools	Damage	Damage Types	Hit Locations
Per day	2d	1	Shock	One location
Per hour	4d	2	Killing	Two adjacent locations
Per minute	6d	Width	Shock and Killing	All locations
Per round	8d	Width + 1		
Immediate	10d	Width + 2		
	Automatic*	(or more)		

* *Automatic:* The threat does not require a roll, but any successful defense roll reduces the damage by the width of the roll. For purposes of determining damage only, an automatic threat has a width of 2. The defense roll may be attempted once each time increment of the threat.

Part 2

Powers



Chapter 5: Archetypes

An Archetype is the foundation of a character. It's a conglomeration of special abilities called Meta-Qualities that define your character on a fundamental level, totaled to a Point cost. Meta-Qualities do many things—they might grant bonuses in-game, define the source of your powers, or establish some unique aspect of your character. Most importantly, Meta-Qualities define the types of powers your character can possess. Archetypes and Meta-Qualities allow the game moderator to define exactly what kinds of superhuman characters are appropriate to the game.

For instance, the Anachronist Archetype allows you to construct gadgets—super-advanced high-tech items. The Anachronist Archetype enables you to create gadgets because it contains the Inventor Meta-Quality, which costs 5 Points and allows a character to build superpowered foci. You

could add the Inventor Meta-Quality to any Archetype, allowing that Archetype to build gadgets, too. But while the Anachronist Archetype allows you to build miraculous devices using the Gadgeteering Miracle, it doesn't let you buy internal, non-gadget powers—you could build a flying belt, but you couldn't fly on your own power. That would take a different Meta-Quality.

Archetypes help you keep your character internally consistent by giving you ground rules for character construction and development. And by defining what kinds of superhuman abilities characters can have, archetypes help the GM define the nature of the game world. A campaign with a very specific focus might allow only one Archetype—like the Talents in *Godlike*—period! Or your GM might take the lid all the way off and not use Archetypes at all.



Meta-Qualities

Meta-Qualities are the building blocks of Archetypes. They explain a character's origin and source of power, and sometimes they include abilities intrinsically linked to an Archetype, common to all characters who have it. If members of an alien race all have gills, all characters with that race's Archetype have gills. If all Amazons from a particular lost island are telepathic, all characters with the Amazonian Archetype have telepathy.

An Archetype can have any number of Meta-Qualities. Tally them together to arrive at a total Archetype cost in Points.

There are three types of Archetype Meta-Qualities: Source Meta-Qualities (the origin of your powers), Permission Meta-Qualities (the type of powers you're permitted to purchase at character creation), and Intrinsic Meta-Qualities (special abilities or drawbacks that are fundamental to your superhuman nature).

Source Meta-Qualities

Source Meta-Qualities define why your character has superhuman abilities; if you have the Genetic Source, you have powers because you're genetically modified. Characters usually have only one Source Meta-Quality, but some have more.

All internal powers are considered to be "contained" within the Source Meta-Quality—it's what grants you powers. If you have the Alien Archetype and Teleportation, it's assumed you can teleport because you're an alien. If your Archetype or Meta-Quality is somehow disrupted (for example, you're a Mutant and someone changes your genetic structure), all powers contained within it are lost.

The advantage of multiple Sources is redundancy: If you have multiple Sources you choose which one applies to each power at character creation. If you have both the Divine and Paranormal Sources and something disrupts the powers that stem from

The First Source is Free

Don't forget that when you add up Archetype costs.

your Divine Source, the powers in your Paranormal Source remain unaffected. Given the frequency of power-blocking technology and magic in comics, this is a significant advantage.

The first Source is free. Each Source after that is bought at normal cost. To be superhuman, a character must have at least one Source Meta-Quality.

Source: Conduit (5 Points)

You're a gateway to an extradimensional source of energy, and your powers are a careful application of that force.

Source: Construct (5 Points)

You're an artificial entity created by magic or super-science, and your powers derive from your artificial nature.

Source: Cyborg (5 Points)

You're part human, part machine. Your machine components are housed in any hit locations on your body, and can be built as foci—see page 134 for details. Choose those locations at character creation. You still require a Permission Meta-Quality to determine what powers your cyborg components can possess.

Source: Divine (5 Points)

Your powers are derived from a deity or deities, or through your divine nature.

Source: Driven (5 Points)

Your inhuman drive has pushed you past the bounds of human potential.

Source: Extraterrestrial/Extradimensional (5 Points)

You're from another planet or dimension and your powers are derived from your alien nature.

Source: Genetic (5 Points)

Your powers are a result of genetic enhancement.

Source: Life Force (5 Points)

Your abilities are based upon the manipulation of your life force—the secret power all living beings possess.

Source: Paranormal (5 Points)

Your powers are magical in nature.

Source: Power Focus (–8 Points)

All your powers are embedded in a single unique focus (see page 134) or must be channeled through one to work properly. If that focus is destroyed, your powers are unusable and return only at the GM's discretion—if ever. You still need a Permission Meta-Quality to determine what powers your focus can possess.

Source: Psi (5 Points)

Your powers are psionic: You manipulate the world through the power of your mind.

Source: Technological (5 Points)

Your powers come from advanced technology. Either you wield high-tech gadgets or you're the product of super-science.

Source: Unknown (–5 Points)

Your Source is a mystery. Your powers are just as baffling to you as they are to others.

Permission Meta-Qualities

Permission Meta-Qualities grant permission to purchase certain superhuman powers for your character. If you have the Hypertrained Meta-Quality, you can buy any type of Hyperskill, but not Miracles such as Flight.

With the Super Permission, you can buy any power you wish. Permission Meta-Qualities are not powers, only license to purchase powers.

You can't buy a Permission without a Source; you must have at least one of each. The Source defines the *why* of your powers, the Permission defines the *what*.

Permission: Hypertrained (5 Points)

You can purchase any number of Hyperskills and any kind of dice with them.

Permission: Inhuman Stats (1+ Points)

Characters with this Permission have limits on Stats that are different from the ordinary limits. Where humans are limited to five dice in a Stat (not counting Hyperstat dice; see page 104), your Archetype might have more, perhaps even in more than one Stat. In addition, the maximum allowed Stat sets the maximum allowed Skill for all Skills based on that Stat.

This Permission costs 3 Points for each inhuman Stat. That Stat, and all Skills based on it, can have up to 10d rather than the normal 5d limit, and can have Hard Dice, Wiggle Dice, additional Power Qualities, Power Quality Levels, Extras and Flaws. The inhuman Stat is not affected if your Willpower reaches zero, like a typical Hyperstat would be.

For each Stat that has a maximum *lower* than five, subtract 1 Point from the cost of this Permission per die lower than five. This also restricts your maximum dice with Skills associated with the restricted Stat. The Permission has a minimum cost of 1 Point.

For example, if your Archetype allows you to have up to 10 dice in Body (and Body Skills), the Inhuman Stats Permission costs 3 Points. If it also allows a maximum of only three dice in Coordination (and Coordination Skills; two fewer than usual), the Permission costs only 1 Point.

Permission: Inventor (5 Points)

You can build external powers of any type embedded in foci, also known as gadgets (when based on high technology) or artifacts (when based on magic). You may buy any number of dice in the Gadgeteering power (see page 145), but all other powers must be built into foci. You cannot take any other permanent, internal power without buying another Permission.

Permission: One Power (1 Point)

You can have any one Hyperstat, Hyperskill, or Miracle—but only one. (This can still be pretty broad with a “Variable Effect” Miracle such as Cosmic Power, page 142.)

Permission: Peak Performer (5 Points)

You may purchase any kind of dice with your Stats and Skills, up to the normal limit of five dice in a Stat or Skill unless you have Inhuman Stats. You can have 5wd in Body, for example, or 5hd in Coordination and 5wd in Body, but not 6d in either one.

Permission: Power Theme (5 Points)

You can buy Hyperstats, Hyperskills, and Miracles, but all powers must fit a certain theme, such as “cold-based powers,” “solar powers,” “monkey powers,” or whatever you and the GM agree on.

Permission: Prime Specimen (5 Points)

You can buy Hyperstats without restriction.

Permission: Super (15 Points)

You can purchase any number and types of dice with Hyperstats, Hyperskills, and powers.

Permission: Super-Equipment (2 Points)

During character creation only, you can buy any number of powers embedded in foci. This Permission does not give you the ability to buy internal powers or the Gadgeteering Miracle; it only allows you to buy gadgets or artifacts during character creation. To get a new one after character creation you must have the GM’s permission.

Intrinsic Meta-Qualities

Intrinsic Meta-Qualities are fundamental to the character’s superhuman nature. Usually they apply to all characters with the Archetype. With the GM’s permission you can have an Intrinsic that is unique to your character—most Mutants don’t have Custom Hit Locations, for instance, but perhaps you do—but this is rare.

Intrinsics essentially change the rules of the game for your character. Intrinsics are always active; they don’t need to be activated like ordinary powers, Hyperskills, or Hyperstats. Consequently, they always have the same effect. They can’t be improved without the GM’s permission.

This has a unique advantage: Most Intrinsics can always be used in the resolve phase of a combat round (if it makes sense), without a declaration and without treating it as an extra action. It just works.

Intrinsics Without Archetypes

Like Intrinsics but hate Archetypes? Fair enough. Let players buy Intrinsics just like other powers and don’t worry about Archetypes, Permissions and Sources.

Some Intrinsic Meta-Qualities are detrimental in effect, reducing the overall cost of the Archetype by a certain number of Points. However, the minimum cost of an Archetype is always 0 Points: You can never *gain* extra Points by taking an Archetype.

You must have at least one Source Meta-Quality in order to purchase any Intrinsic.

Intrinsic: Allergy (variable cost)

You're allergic to a substance. Exposure to it is enough to drain Willpower, incapacitate or even kill you. To determine the cost reduction, consider the following:

Substance Is . . .	Incapacitates/Kills/ Drains Willpower
Common (grass, water, air, people)	–4/8/16 Points
Frequent (sunlight, cold, asphalt, gasoline)	–3/6/12 Points
Uncommon (diamonds, chlorine, lead)	–2/4/8 Points
Rare (an alien ore, uranium 238)	–1/2/4 Points

Incapacitating allergies inflict 1 point of Shock damage to your torso per combat round when you're 3 yards or less from the source. This damage continues for as long as you remain exposed. If your torso is filled with Shock, you take no more damage but your physical Stats are reduced by 4d for purposes of rolling only.

Killing allergies inflict 1 point of Killing to your torso per round of exposure at 3 yards or less, and all your physical Stats are reduced by 4d for purposes of rolling only.

Willpower-draining allergies reduce your Willpower total by 1 (or Base Will, if you have no Willpower left) when you're 3 yards or less from the source. When your Base Will hits 0, the effect

changes to the equivalent of a Killing allergy (see above).

A character with the No Base Will Intrinsic can take an incapacitating or killing allergy but not a Willpower-draining allergy.

If the allergy affects you only when you touch the substance, the cost reduction is cut in half.

Intrinsic: Brute/Frail (–8 Points)

All your physical actions (including powers) are limited to a maximum width of 2 for initiative purposes only (this does not affect damage or other functions of width). This represents either overwhelming physical power (which makes it difficult to focus on small or swift targets), or a natural frailty that makes it difficult to move too fast. Pick one.

Intrinsic: Custom Stats (5 Points)

During character creation only, as part of your Archetype you may discard any Stat—except Mind—altogether. You may not take or learn Skills that are governed by a Stat you've dropped, and some other rules also apply.

Without a Body Stat: You are immaterial and can't interact with the physical world in any way. This includes any powers you possess—even non-physical ones. To interact with the world, you must purchase a Miracle such as Alternate Forms or Sidekick (see page 140 and 154) that has a Body Stat. All Body rolls made against you must be made against your Alternate Forms or Sidekick dice pool.

Without a Coordination Stat: You are completely motionless; you can't move unless you purchase a power to transport you or have a buddy to carry you around.

Without a Sense Stat: You are completely oblivious to the world and can't react to any stimulus. Unless you purchase a power that senses the world you are deaf, dumb, and blind.

Without a Mind Stat: You must have a Mind Stat, even if you're inhuman. You can't drop it.

Without a Command Stat: You are immune to emotional stimulus, and you have trouble understanding the very concepts of human authority and leadership. The notions of "leader" and "follower"—not to mention "government" and "law"—are completely lost on you. You can't comprehend imperatives, only declarations; the statement "You should go left now to avoid getting stepped on by Doc Saturn" makes sense; the instruction "Go left!" leaves you baffled. On the upside, you are completely immune to the effects of failed Trauma Checks.

Without a Charm Stat: You cannot fathom the concept of emotions. Because nothing has emotional content or context, you cannot interact with any other characters on anything more than a purely fact-based level. You are completely immune to emotional stimulus and are incapable of following even the simplest emotional cues. You might open fire on a six-year-old child because "it bared its teeth in a threatening manner."

Intrinsic: Globular (8 Points)

You are an amorphous, constantly changing life form.

All 34 of your wound boxes are contained in a single hit location (1-10), but you must mark four wound boxes on your character sheet as brain boxes. If these boxes are filled with Shock damage, you are knocked unconscious. If they fill with Killing, you die.

Any of your brain boxes can "split off" from your body, abandoning it in case of gross physical damage (only one can do so; the rest die along with the body). If this is done, you lose all Willpower points except 1. You then can heal your hit boxes back normally, up to your normal level, as per the healing rules on page 61.

This Intrinsic does not give you the ability to do more than one thing at a time, or to heal yourself

instantly by rearranging your body. If you want to be able to use multiple pseudopods at once, buy the Multiple Actions Miracle (see page 152); if you want to regenerate, buy Regeneration (page 154).

Intrinsic: Inhuman (–8 Points)

You're terrifyingly inhuman, or at least you look it, and have no way of disguising yourself to pass for normal. Whether you have wings, claws, or tentacles, the effect is the same—humans who don't know you react to your presence with mindless fear. If surprised, or in combat, NPCs must make a Stability roll to not flee immediately or attack you.

Intrinsic: Mandatory Power (0 Points)

Some particular power is an essential part of this Archetype. This Intrinsic does not give you extra Points like other restrictive Intronics, but each power that's mandatory is automatically covered by your Archetype's Sources, at no extra cost.

Intrinsic: Mutable (15 Points)

At the GM's discretion, you may purchase entirely new powers during game play. (See Character Advancement on page 56.)

Intrinsic: No Base Will (–10 Points)

You have no Base Will and no Willpower score. You are immune to damaging psychological stimuli and powers that directly interfere with perception and thought but character advancement is difficult (see page 58).

You can use powers that require you to bid 1 Willpower point without restriction; if you fail to activate the power, it costs you nothing. However, powers that cost Willpower (see page 115) must have an external Willpower source, such as the Willpower Battery Miracle with the Willpower donated by other characters (see page 158).

Intrinsic: No Willpower (-5 Points)

Like an ordinary human, your character has a Base Will score but no Willpower, and thus none of the advantages that go along with it (see page 52).

Intrinsic: No Willpower No Way (-5 Points)

If your Willpower reaches zero, your powers all fail completely until you gain 1 or more.

Intrinsic: Unhealing (-8 Points)

You do not heal naturally and get no benefit from first aid or medical care. The only way to repair damage is to spend 1 Willpower point outside of combat to restore 1 point of Killing or 2 points of Shock. How long this takes is up to the GM, but it should be a significant amount of time. To heal faster, buy the Regeneration power.

It's possible to have this Intrinsic even if you have no Base Will or Willpower score—you rely solely on the kindness of other creatures with Base Will or Willpower to heal your damage. How this happens is up to the GM.

Intrinsic: Vulnerable (-2 Points per Extra Brain Box)

For each level of this Intrinsic you must designate one additional wound box somewhere on your body as a brain box (see **Intrinsic: Globular**, page 100), in addition to the basic four. If any four of your various brain boxes are filled with Shock damage, you're rendered unconscious. If any four are filled with Killing, you're dead. Be cautious with this Intrinsic—it makes you much more vulnerable to attack.

Intrinsic: Willpower Contest (-10 Points)

Any time you use your powers on a character with Willpower and the target is aware of the attack, you must beat him in a Willpower contest. Both of you "bid" Willpower points during the resolution phase of combat, after you've declared and rolled.

This is a "blind" bid—each side jots down the bid on scratch paper, then compare the bids. If you bid more than your target, your power works normally. If your target bids more, your power fails. Either way, you each lose the Willpower points that you've bid.

Sample Archetypes

These pre-made Archetypes cover a broad spectrum of characters from games of varying "flavors," from gritty to four-color. Each Archetype is meant to be customized by adding or removing Meta-Qualities as appropriate to your game. Ask your GM which of these (if any) are available in your campaign.

Adept (5 Points)

Source: Life Force

Permission: Hypertrained

Description: Your tireless study of some esoteric practice has allowed you to transcend the limitations of the human condition. By channeling your life force you have attained superhuman mastery of otherwise ordinary human abilities, allowing you to buy any number of Hyperskills and maintain a Willpower score.

Additions: Common modifications to the Archetype include the Conduit, Divine, One Power, Paranormal, Prime Specimen, Inventor, One Power, Super, Super-Equipment, Unknown, and Power Focus Meta-Qualities.

Alien (5 Points)

Source: Extraterrestrial/Extradimensional

Permission: Power Theme

Description: You are not of the Earth. Whether you are from an alternate dimension, another planet, or a paranormal continuum, you're just not human. In this most basic form, you are assumed to be humanoid and your hit locations and wound boxes are assigned just like a normal human. If you wish to

be completely alien, purchase the Custom Stats or Globular Meta-Qualities.

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Brute, Conduit, Custom Stats, Cyborg, Genetic, Globular, Inhuman, Inhuman Stats, Inventor, Life Force, Mutable, No Base Will, One Power, Paranormal, Prime Specimen, Power Focus, Psi, Super-Equipment, Technological, and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Anachronist (20 Points)

Source: Genetic, Life Force, Paranormal, Technological, or Extradimensional/Extraterrestrial (pick one)

Permission: Inventor

Intrinsic: Mutable

Description: You are an inventor: one part Einstein's brilliance, one part Tesla's innovation, with a dash of Edison's persistence for flavor. In your laboratory you construct devices that beggar the imagination of the world's most accomplished scientific minds. Whether your creations are mystical or scientific in nature, they transcend what is considered the extent of human ability.

Additions: Common modifications include the Cyborg, Hypertrained, One Power, Prime Specimen, Psi, Super, Super-Equipment, Unknown, and Power Focus Meta-Qualities.

Artificial (12 Points)

Source: Construct

Permission: Super

Intrinsics: No Base Will, Mutable, Unhealing

Description: You are not natural. Someone or something made you. Artificials are usually made in imitation of their creator's race; you are assumed to be humanoid and your hit locations and wound boxes are those of a normal human, but when damaged you must be repaired rather than healing naturally.

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Brute, Conduit, Custom Stats, Cyborg, Divine, Extradimensional/Extraterrestrial, Genetic, Hypertrained, Inhuman, Inhuman Stats, Inventor, Life Force, One Power, Prime Specimen, Psi, Super-Equipment, Technological, Power Focus and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Godlike Talent (0 Points)

Source: Psi

Permission: Super

Intrinsics: Mandatory Power, Willpower Contest, No Willpower No Way

Mandatory Power: Perceive *Godlike* Talents 2hd (U; Flaw: See It First -1; costs 4 Points).

Description: Talents from *Godlike* are humans with the peculiar ability to change reality with the power of their minds alone. They possess several unique abilities and limitations—such as the ability to detect and resist the powers of others of their kind. There is no physiological aspect to the phenomena; they are wholly psychic in nature.

In *Godlike*, Talents are usually built on 25 Points with normal Stats and Skills provided free. Using Wild Talents rules such characters are built on 125 Points.

Additions: For postwar Wild Talents in the *Godlike* world, build them normally without this Archetype. You can pick or create any other Archetype you like; they have transcended the limitations of their predecessors and are now truly superhuman.

Godling (20 Points)

Sources: Divine, Paranormal

Permissions: Super

Description: You're not *the* God, but *a* god, surely; or perhaps you are related to a divine entity of some sort and have been exiled to spend your unnaturally long life in the mortal realm.

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Brute/Frail, Conduit, Custom Stats, Extr

aterrestrial/Extradimensional, Inhuman, Inhuman Stats, Inventor, Life Force, Mandatory Power, Mutable, One Power, Power Focus, Prime Specimen, Psi, Technological, and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Human+ (15 Points)

Source: Genetic, Psi or Technological

Permission: Super

Description: You're a human modified by science, or something else, to be something more. Whatever experiment or accident befell you, it granted you powers beyond the rank and file of humanity.

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Brute/Frail, Conduit, Custom Hit Locations, Custom Stats, Hypertrained, Genetic, Inventor, Life Force, Mutable, No Base Will, Paranormal, Psi, Power Focus, Super-Equipment, Technological, and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Mutant (5 Points)

Source: Genetic

Permission: Power Theme

Description: You're the next phase of evolution. Due to some sort of radiation-induced or genetic mutation, you are physiologically different from normal members of your species.

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Brute/Frail, Conduit, Custom Hit Locations, Custom Stats, Extraterrestrial/Extradimensional, Hypertrained, Inventor, Life Force, Mutable, No Base Will, One Power, Paranormal, Psi, Power Focus, Super-Equipment, Technological, and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Mystic (21 Points)

Source: Paranormal

Permissions: One Power (Cosmic Power), Inventor

Intrinsic: Mutable

Description: You have discovered the secrets of magic. With your exceptional Willpower you focus mystical energies to create numerous superhuman effects and create magical items. (Your powers take a supernatural, magical form; instead of traditional Cosmic Power and Gadgeteering, you practice spellcasting and enchant objects.)

Additions: Common modifications include the Allergy, Conduit, Custom Hit Locations, Custom Stats, Construct, Extraterrestrial/Extradimensional, Genetic, Hypertrained, Life Force, Mutable, One Power, Super, Technological, Unknown, and Power Focus Meta-Qualities.

Super-Normal (5 Points)

Source: Driven

Permission: Peak Performer

Description: You're an exceptional member of your species, so exceptional you're considered superhuman by the rank and file of your native population.

Additions: Common modifications include the Divine, Extraterrestrial/Extradimensional, Inventor, Life Force, Mutable, Paranormal, Psi, One Power, Power Focus, Super-Equipment, Technological, and Unknown Meta-Qualities.

Chapter 6: What Is a Power?

Powers are amazing abilities that normal humans just don't have. You build a power by buying dice for it with character Points, just like buying dice for a Stat or a Skill. The more dice you have with the power, the better it works.

Here we'll take you through all the steps to build a power and determine the cost. But first, let's wrap our minds around what types of superpowers there are.

Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Miracles

Is the power a superpowered Stat (called a Hyperstat), a superpowered Skill (called a Hyperskill), or a power that's not related to any Stat or Skill (called a Miracle)?

If a power is an exaggerated effect of something that a normal human being could do, you probably want to build it as a Hyperstat or a Hyperskill. See page 39 for their costs.

A Hyperstat adds dice or special abilities to a particular Stat (like Body or Mind). A Hyperskill adds dice to a particular Skill (like Ranged Weapon or Research). Sometimes, however, the Stat or Skill itself is within the normal human range (up to 5d), but has some special ability attached to it, making it superhuman (like the ability to light something on fire with a punch). That counts as a Hyperstat or Hyperskill, too.

If a power is not related at all to any human ability, then it's a Miracle. The power of flight is a Miracle, because it has no relation to anything humans can normally do. Same with a "power blast."

A Miracle has its own dice pool. When you want to use it, roll only its dice without adding them to a Stat or Skill.

If it sounds like there are a lot of variations to choose from, that's deliberate. *Wild Talents* is built to be flexible.



EXAMPLE: Let's examine a power as seen through all three power types. Let's say your power concept is fire control. How you build it depends on what you want it to do.

You could build the power of flaming fists into your Body, as a Hyperstat. (Since Body covers hitting things, adding this to your Hyperbody means you can hit things and light them on fire.)

As a Hyperskill you could build the power of "Flaming Fists" into, say, a Skill called Martial Arts (The Way of Fire) and add this dice pool to your Body Stat. You'd roll Body + Martial Arts (The Way of Fire) to use your flaming fists. Keep in mind a Skill is naturally limited: If the Stat it's connected to doesn't apply to the situation—the enemy is too far for you to grab or hit with Body, for instance—the Skill can't be used.

As a Miracle, you could build a power called "Master of Flame." This is a dice pool unto itself; it allows you to create and control fire with a dice pool roll. The advantage of something like this is that it can be used at a distance (if you choose to build it that way), while the Hyperstat (Body) or Hyperskill (Martial Arts, a Body Skill) are limited to things you can touch.

What Are Powers?

Powers are usually composed of three types of things: Power Qualities; Extras and Flaws; and Power Capacities. When you create a power, start with its Power Quality. That will tell you what Power Capacities it has. Then you can add any Extras and Flaws that modify that Power Quality or its Power Capacities.

If your power has more than one Power Quality, do the same thing for each of them separately: Quality type, Capacities, and Extras and Flaws.

Power Qualities

All powers are composed of Power Qualities. A Power Quality defines what the power can do in gameplay. It's the most basic building block of a power. If you don't have any Power Qualities, you don't have any power.

There are three Power Qualities: Attacks (which allows the power to attack), Defends (which allows the power to defend) and Useful (which allows the power to do something besides attack and defend).

Think of each Power Quality as one particular effect of the power, one type of thing it can do. A power can have any number of Power Qualities, each of which covers a specific use of the power under its appropriate quality. Each additional quality adds to the Point cost of the power making it more expensive to purchase.

Extras and Flaws

Some powers use Extras to add utility to Power Qualities and increase their cost (such as adding the ability to penetrate armor to your Master of Flame power). *Some* powers use Flaws to remove utility from Power Qualities and decrease their cost (such as making it necessary to utter the words "LIGHT IT UP!" every time you need to activate your Master of Flame power).

There is no upward limit to cost by adding Extras, but Flaws can only reduce power costs to a *minimum* of 1 Point per Power Quality.

Power Capacities

Each Power Quality has a Power Capacity that defines the scope of its effect on the world. Can it affect anything I can see? Can it only affect things I can touch? Capacity determines this.

The Power Capacities are Mass, Range, Speed, Touch, and Self. One Capacity must be chosen with each Power Quality when the power is built; this is generally free, but in some cases adding a particular

Capacity to a particular type of power must be bought as an Extra or Flaw.

EXAMPLE: Let's move forward with building the "Master of Flame" power. We won't deal with Point costs yet, just the basic building blocks.

For Power Qualities, you choose Attacks (Flame Blast), Defends (Flame Shield) and Useful (Create Flame). (If you wanted, you could add any number of additional Power Qualities with more specific uses.)

Say you want the Penetration 2 Extra for your Attacks and Useful Quality. This increases the cost for each and makes it possible for your Flame Blast to burrow through Heavy Armor.

Next, on every Power Quality you want to take the Flaw called Nervous Habit, which says you must shout "LIGHT IT UP!" to activate any of the qualities. This reduces the cost of all three Power Qualities but makes it possible to prevent you from using your power with something as simple as a ball-gag.

Finally, you pick a Capacity for each Power Quality. For Attacks (Flame Blast) you choose Range, meaning you can hit targets at a distance. For Defends (Flame Shield) you choose Self, meaning you can defend yourself. And lastly, you pick Range for Useful (Create Flame).

Power Qualities

All powers are composed of Power Qualities. A Power Quality defines what the power can do in gameplay. It's the most basic building block of a power. There are three Power Qualities: Attacks, Defends and Useful. Think of each Power Quality as one particular effect of the power, one type of thing your power can do. A power can have any number of Power Qualities.

Power Quality: Attacks

With the Attacks quality, you can attack things with your power. Roll its dice like any other attack, using height to determine hit location. It inflicts width in Shock and Killing damage. Without the Attacks quality, you can't use your power to attack.

Power Quality: Defends

With the Defends quality, you can defend yourself with your power. Roll its dice like any other defense roll, with height and width determining which dice it can gobble from attacks against you. Without the Defends quality, you can't use your power to defend.

Power Quality: Useful

With the Useful quality, you can do something else with your power that's neither an attack nor a defense. This can be literally anything you want: flying, creating frogs, reading minds and healing super-fast are all examples of Useful Power Qualities. Roll the power's dice to activate the power, using width for speed and height for effectiveness, as usual.

Adding Power Quality Levels

On each Power Quality, you can add Power Quality Levels to make it even more effective. While the Power Quality itself costs 2 Points per die, each additional Power Quality Level costs +1 Point per die.

Attacks: If your power has the Attacks quality, each additional Attacks level adds +1 damage to a successful attacks.

Defends: If it has the Defends quality, each additional Defends level adds one gobble die to a successful defense, using the height and width of the defense roll.

Useful: If it has the Useful quality, each additional Useful level offsets one penalty die when you use the power in difficult circumstances.

EXAMPLE: Your 8d "Master of Flame" power has Attacks, Defends and Useful Power

What About Robust?

The game *Godlike* and the first edition of *Wild Talents* had a fourth Power Quality called Robust, which defined how likely your power was to simply shut down if you were hurt or seriously distracted. We've removed it as a Power Quality in *Wild Talents* Second Edition. By comparison, all powers are assumed to be robust—they don't shut down when you're hurt unless you take a Flaw called Fragile. We'll talk about Flaws in a moment.

Qualities. If you wanted, you could add an additional +2 Attacks Power Quality Levels (adding +2 Points of cost per die), meaning your power would inflict +2 damage to a successful attack. Or you could add +2 Useful Power Quality Levels (+2 Points of cost per die), which would offset two penalty dice: You could attempt two more actions with the power in the same round and lose no dice from your pool, or you could attempt one additional action and a called shot without losing any dice.

Hyperstat and Hyperskill Power Qualities

Hyperstats have all three Power Qualities (Attacks, Defends, Useful) by default. Hyperskills are more narrow: They have one of the three Power Qualities, depending on the Skill involved. Brawling has the Attacks quality; Block has the Defends quality; Perception has Useful; and so on.

You can add another Power Quality to a Hyperskill for the usual 2 Points per die.

You can add Power Quality Levels, Extras and Flaws to each Power Quality of a Hyperstat or Hyperskill at the usual costs.

It's possible to take Power Quality Levels on some dice of a Stat or a Skill but not on others. If that's the case, when you use those Power Quality Levels you can roll only the dice that have the levels. If you don't use the Power Quality Levels, of course, you can use all the dice of the Stat or Skill.

EXAMPLE: You have 2d in Brawling, and 3d in the Brawling Hyperskill with +4 Attacks levels. When you use Brawling, you can choose to either roll 3d in Brawling with +4 Attacks levels, or roll 5d in Brawling without the bonus Attacks levels.

It's also possible to take Power Quality Levels on Stat dice but not on a Skill that you roll with that Stat, or vice versa. Since Stats and Skills are different kinds of characteristics in the game, you *can* use the full dice pool even if your Stat dice don't exactly match the Power Quality Levels of your Skill dice.

EXAMPLE: You have 5d in Body, and 3d in the Brawling Hyperskill with +4 Attacks levels. You roll 8d for your Body + Brawling Skill and gain +4 damage from Brawling's Attacks quality levels.

This makes it possible to get powerful effects with a low cost in Points: You could take 1d in a Skill and load it down with Power Quality Levels, then apply it to a high Stat for a large, powerful dice pool. The down side, however, is that each Stat has a fairly narrow range of ways it can be used, and Skills are narrower still.

Multiple Qualities

It's common to have a Miracle with more than one Power Quality. When you use the power, simply choose which Power Quality you're going to use and roll the power's dice. If you want to use more than one Power Quality in the same round, it requires multiple actions.

It's also common to have more than one version of the same Power Quality: More than one Attacks quality, or more than one Useful quality, or more than one version of Defends, all in the same overall power. As usual, each Power Quality has its own specific effect and has a starting cost of 2 Points per die.

You can have different Power Quality Levels on each version of a Power Quality. You could have one Attacks quality with +2 Attacks levels (costing 4 Points per die) and another Attacks with +4 Attacks levels (costing 6 Points per die). This can be very appealing when you add Extras and Flaws to a Power Quality; you can have one version of Attacks that has tremendous effects but a lot of limitations, and another version that is not quite so powerful but is not as limited. We'll discuss Extras and Flaws on page 116.

Useful Miracles

Powers that attack and defend use the combat rules that we detailed in Chapter 4. The Useful Power Quality needs a little more attention here.

What can a power with the Useful quality do? Pretty much anything you want. That's why it's called a Miracle.

Does your Miracle let you fly? That's a Useful quality. Does it let you turn lead to gold? Useful. Does it let you set things on fire? It probably has Attacks, but if you can set things on fire without hurting them, that's Useful. Breathe water? Useful. Ignore the effects of radiation? Useful. Recarbonate stale soda water? Useful. (You'll be a hit at long-running tabletop roleplaying game sessions.)

The possibilities for a Useful quality are literally endless, but there's one important requirement: A Useful quality must be specific. One Useful quality has one function. If you want another function, you need another Useful quality.

Let's say you have a power called Scintillating Force Fields. You could take a Useful Power Quality that lets you fly on your force fields. You could take another Useful quality that lets you enclose and hold objects

at a distance with force fields. But you couldn't have a single Useful quality that lets you fly *and* lets you hold things in place at a distance. The two functions are different enough that they need separate Power Qualities.

How do you tell when a function needs its own Power Quality? That's a judgment call. Usually it's pretty obvious ("flight" vs. "rigid chains of binding force"); when in doubt, see what the GM and the other players think. The Miracle Cafeteria in this book has a ton of examples.

Putting Your Useful Miracle to Work

You can often use a Useful Power Quality to enhance or even replace a Skill roll—if you're rifling through a room for evidence, for example, telekinesis or super-speed can make it a snap.

If you use a power to set up a Skill for a better result, first roll for the power. If it succeeds, you get width in bonus dice to the Skill roll.

Note that this requires two separate rolls, so if you're pressed for time you can't do both in the same combat round.

You can use your power to help another character's Skill roll using the rules for cooperating on a task (page 29).

There are possible down sides. If you're trying to search that room without leaving a mess, going through everything at super-speed probably isn't the best way. Any time you use a power to aid a Skill roll, the GM should feel free to play up unintended consequences.

Dangerously Useful

You can't use the Useful quality to attack someone directly—that's what the Attacks quality is for. However, there may be times when you can use a Useful Power Quality to expose an enemy to some threat that they could otherwise avoid.

Maybe you use a Levitation power to lift someone up toward the whirling blades overhead, or maybe you

grab someone when you fly by with your Flight power and take them up high for a long drop. In those cases your power isn't attacking, so don't roll your power's dice pool to inflict damage; the damage comes from the whirling blades or from gravity.

The lack of the Attacks quality simply means you cannot roll your power's dice pool to attack, so your power can inflict no damage directly. But it may still put an enemy in a deadly situation.

Useful Game Effects

A Useful Power Quality is a great way to beef up miscellaneous game characteristics. You could have a Useful quality that heals damage, for example; a Useful quality that adds wound boxes to make you tougher; a Useful quality that rearranges your hit location numbers; a Useful quality that holds somebody in place; there's any number of possibilities.

There are a couple of rules of thumb with this kind of power. First, if it has any effect on damage, measure its effect in width and it affects one hit location. So a healing power heals width in Shock and Killing damage. A power that gives you more wound boxes gives you width in wound boxes on a single location.

A power that restricts another character's actions can always be opposed by a resistance roll; see page 114.

For a power that has an "on/off" effect, you simply need a successful roll. With a power to rearrange your hit locations, for example, you roll to activate it. If it works, you rearrange your hit locations. Because each Useful quality must be specific (see page 108), you need to specify in the power's description exactly how your hit locations are arranged after you change.

Duds

Some characters have powers that are impossible for ordinary human beings, which might add color or flavor to the game but which have no real impact on the world. Maybe your character never ages. Pretty cool, but when is it going to affect the course of the game?

Or maybe your power is to make things colored red. No damage to them, no transformations, nothing dramatic; it just changes their color. In Godlike's World War II, they nicknamed such powers "Duds."

A Dud is a special kind of Useful Power Quality that costs exactly one Point per die. But there's a catch: The other players and GM need to agree that it's mostly a useless power.

Because a Dud is a special kind of Useful Power Quality, it's entirely possible to have one as part of an overall power that has other, much more useful (and expensive) qualities. Or it can be a standalone, single-quality dice pool that costs only one Point per die. It's up to you.

With a Dud you don't need to spend a lot of time working out the exact value of Extras and Flaws. Since it's not going to be crucial to the game, we allow a lot of hand-waving with its definition. If you and the other players and GM all agree that a power qualifies as a Dud, then it costs 1 Point per die and you're done.

Power Capacities

Each Power Quality has a Power Capacity that defines the scope of its effect on the world. The Power Capacities are Mass, Range, Speed, Touch, and Self.

Mass

A Power Quality with the mass capacity affects some amount of mass beyond your own body. This doesn't give you any fine control over that mass (unless your power has a Useful quality to that effect), but it lets the power somehow affect that much mass. The details depend on the nature of the power. With the mass capacity on the Attacks quality, the power inflicts knockback.

Range

A power with the Range capacity affects things at a distance.

Speed

A power with the Speed capacity allows you to move at a certain speed. (And if your Power Quality also has the Touch or Range capacity, you can affect someone else's speed.)

Touch

A power with the Touch capacity affects things apart from your own body, but only if you can touch them.

Self

A power with the Self capacity affects only your own character.

Choosing a Power Capacity

The Power Quality determines which *default* Power Capacity it has. The list below reflects only the default “free” Power Capacities. You can always choose to enhance a power by buying another Power Capacity type as an Extra.

Attacks: Either the Mass capacity or the Range capacity, your choice.

Defends: Self.

Useful: Either Mass, Range or Speed, your choice.

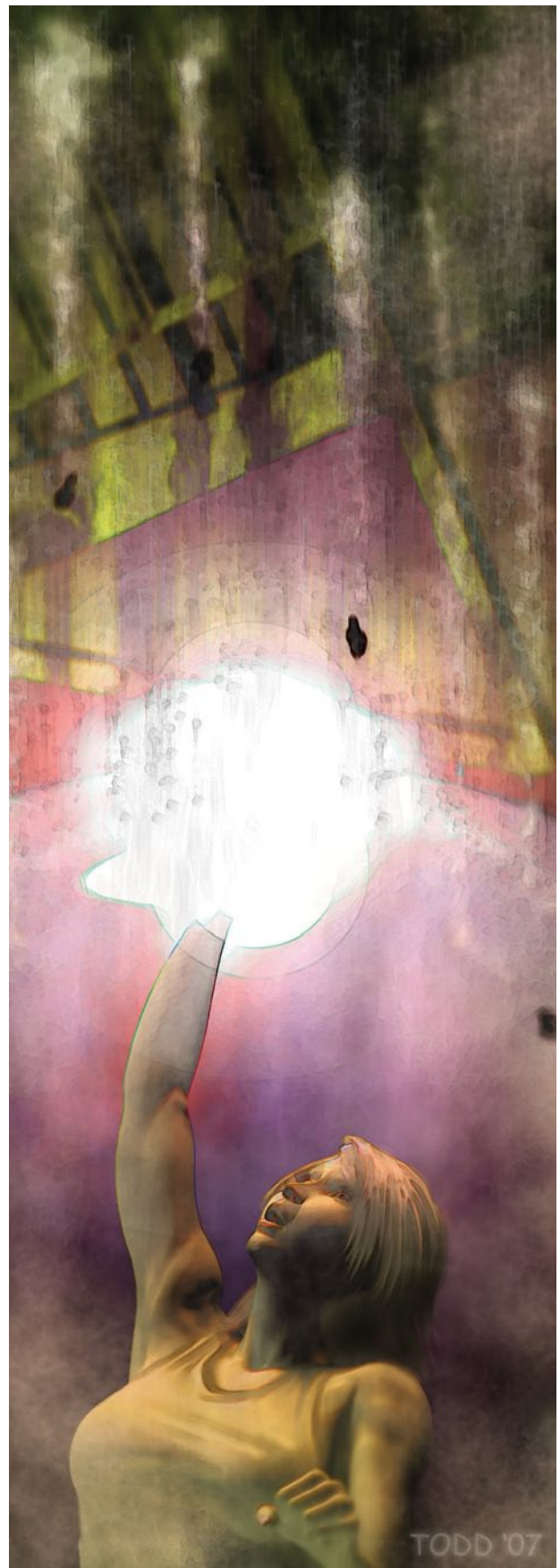
Once you choose a Power Capacity, that's the capacity for that Power Quality, permanently. You can't change it as you go—but again, if you really want your “Master of Flame” Power Quality to have not just Range, but also Mass and Speed, you can add capacities to a Power Quality using Extras.

How Much Capacity?

How much mass can the power affect? How much range does it have? How fast can it make you go?

The amount of a power's capacity depends on the size of its dice pool. The more dice you have, the better your control over the Miracle and the greater its range or scope.

See the Power Capacities Table on page 111 for the scope of your power's capacity.



Power Capacities Table

Dice Pool	Mass	Range	Speed
1d	50 lbs (25 kg)	10 yards	2 yards
2d	100 lbs (50 kg)	20 yards	5 yards
3d	200 lbs (100 kg)	40 yards	10 yards
4d	400 lbs (200 kg)	80 yards	20 yards
5d	800 lbs (400 kg)	160 yards	40 yards
6d	1,600 lbs (800 kg)	320 yards	80 yards
7d	1.6 tons	640 yards	160 yards
8d	3.2 tons	1,280 yards	320 yards
9d	6.4 tons	2,560 yards	640 yards
10d	12.8 tons	5,120 yards	1,280 yards

Capacities and Multiple Qualities

Each Power Quality has its own Power Capacity, so it's possible to have a different capacity on each quality of the same overall power. You could have an Attacks quality with range, a Useful quality with mass, and another Useful quality with speed, for example.

Switching and Combining Power Capacities

If your Power Quality has more than one Power Capacity, you can change which capacity you use on a round-by-round basis simply by declaring you are doing so. You must announce this in the Declaration phase, *before you roll*.

Combining capacities is easy. If your Power Quality has more than one Power Capacity, you can split your dice pool between these capacities by declaring you are doing so. Again, you must declare this in the Declaration phase, *before you roll*.

EXAMPLE: Your Useful Power Quality “Master of Flame” has the Power Capacities mass, range and speed. Each round you can choose to use any *one* of these three capacities. For example, you can choose to affect mass, hit something at range or increase something's speed with your power. Or you can choose to put 5d in mass and 3d in speed; meaning that

you can move 800 lbs (5d) at approximately 10 yards per round (3d), or 50 lbs (1d) at approximately 160 yards per round (7d).

Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Power Capacities

Hyperstats and Hyperskills have no Power Capacities except for Body's ability to lift and manipulate masses. You get no Power Capacity with a Hyperstat or a Hyperskill beyond what that Stat or Skill could ordinarily do.

If you want to add a Power Capacity to a Hyperstat or Hyperskill—if you want to add range to your Brawling Skill so you can punch somebody who's across the room, perhaps—take an Extra such as Power Capacity (Range) or Power Capacity (Speed).

How Many Dice (and What Type)?

Exactly how many dice (and what dice types) do you need in your power? That depends on how well you want the power to work. If you want it to work reliably, buy a large dice pool so your odds of rolling matching dice are high.

In addition to normal dice that you roll, you can buy special dice called Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice in powers. Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice are particularly powerful ways to achieve superhuman effects and

dramatically affect your chances at a successful match. You don't just roll your Miracle's dice and hope for the best. Instead, you always set Hard Dice at "10," and you can set each Wiggle Die to whatever value you want. You can set a Wiggle Die to 10, or you can set it to match the value of another die in your pool. Each Wiggle Die can be a different value if you want.

Hard Dice cost twice as much as normal dice. Wiggle Dice cost four times as much as normal dice (i.e., twice as much as Hard Dice).

A large dice pool not only helps you roll well, it also gives you high Power Capacities. If you're interested in a power that works very reliably but has limited Power Capacities, you could take a small dice pool but make two of them Hard Dice, or make one of them a Wiggle Die, to guarantee success.

Normal Dice Pool

This is the standard power. You roll normal dice and look for matching sets.

Hard Dice

If you want your power to have a static effect every time you use it—a sort of binary, "on/off" effect—take Hard Dice in it. All you need to do is turn it on and it always has the same effect because its roll is always exactly the same.

Taking two or more Hard Dice is tempting: Hard Dice always come up "10," so they always give you perfect performance. Hard Dice represent invariable perfection. But sometimes a perfect performance doesn't give you the perfect result.

Hard Dice represent a rote action, something hard-wired into your character—the ability to use a power at full power, perfectly, at any time. But a power with Hard Dice is outside your conscious control, and that makes it inflexible.

You can turn a power with Hard Dice on or off, but its effect is always the same. This becomes very apparent with movement powers. With Hard Dice in

a movement power you always move your maximum distance each round.

You can use or discard normal dice and Wiggle Dice from your pool as needed, but if you have any Hard Dice in your pool you must roll all of them or none. If you deliberately discard one Hard Die, you must discard *all* your Hard Dice. (However, an external factor that removes one Hard Die from your roll does not require you to drop all your Hard Dice; but Hard Dice cannot be deliberately finessed.)

With Hard Dice in an attack such as an energy blast or super strength, you always hit what appears to be the most vital part of your target (hit location 10) as hard as possible—you can't voluntarily reduce the damage without losing all Hard Dice in the roll.

Now, let's say you take a single action, and you get 2x10 with your two Hard Dice and 2x5 with your normal dice. You always choose which set to use (see page 21), so you can choose whether to use the 2x10 or the 2x5.

But you need to have a pretty good dice pool to get a normal set on top of your Hard Dice. If you want to question a thug after shooting him with your Hard Dice in your Shooting (Archery) Hyperskill, chances are he won't be answering any questions—ever. If you need to extend, throw, or change your chess game with Hard Dice in your chess Hyperskill, you just can't do it; the perfect excellence of your power is beyond your conscious control.

EXAMPLE: If you take 4hd in the "Master of Flame" power, it *always* triggers at a 4x10, pretty effectively incinerating anyone on the receiving end. If you try to discard a Hard Die from your pool, you lose *all* your Hard Dice. In this case that means the power works at full force, or not at all.

Wiggle Dice

If you want your power to be incredibly dynamic and effective, take Wiggle Dice in it. With Wiggle Dice you can scale your power's effects back as much as you like, or give exactly the kind of performance you want—perfect, oafishly clumsy, or anything in between. You can come across as a genius or an idiot and be utterly convincing either way. Powers with Wiggle Dice are conscious, deliberate and under your absolute control.

You can combine Wiggle Dice with normal dice and Hard Dice to get a very flexible power; you can combine a single Wiggle Die with a single normal die to guarantee a successful roll every time you use the power.

If you attempt an action that causes you to lose a die, such as a special maneuver (page 25), you drop Hard Dice first, then normal dice, then Wiggle Dice.

EXAMPLE: If you take 2wd in the “Master of Flame” power, you can control your power any way you like, choosing to activate it with a 2x1, 2x2, 2x3—all the way up to a 2x10 each round. This gives you amazing finesse.

Mixed Pools

Many powers have various dice types in them. Building a power with regular, Hard and Wiggle Dice in it can lead to interesting results.

If you want a power that will *always* activate, a regular dice pool plus one Wiggle Die is a good choice. This guarantees a success. For something with a narrower effect, take two Hard Dice. This represents a reflexive power that always goes off at full power.

More than two Wiggle Dice in an otherwise normal dice pool represents a power that always manifests at a level the player chooses, and might manifest much, much higher if the player rolls regular dice in a matching set and extends it.

Hard Dice are poor combinations with regular dice pools, since they rarely, if ever work with regular rolled dice (those dice must roll 10 to match them).

A combination of Hard and Wiggle Dice is odd but effective. In a pool of regular dice this mix can offer a binary effect—either the Wiggle Die can be set to match the Hard Die (causing a 2x10) or it can be set to match other regular dice. This can represent a power that has finesse, but also has a fallback high-level attack that can be used to clear the room quickly.

Only One Die

So, you've taken a power with only a single die. Maybe it's a brand-new power, and your character barely knows how to use it. Kind of hard to get a set with just one die, isn't it? Never fear. All you need to do is take extra time (page 29) to get one or (at a maximum) two bonus dice with your roll. If you have just a single normal die, that won't do you too much good in a crisis, but with enough time to work at it you'll eventually activate the power. If your power has only a single Wiggle Die, of course, all you need is one round to prepare to get a single die that you can match with the Wiggle Die. (Note that while taking extra time adds dice, it does not affect your Power Capacities!)

EXAMPLE: Say for some reason you take only 1d in your “Master of Flame” power. You couldn't activate the power in one round. Instead, you must take extra time to activate it (adding +1d per round up to +2d). So, at 1d, if you concentrate for two rounds and then try to use it, you get a 3d “Master of Flame” roll.

And if you're not in combat or some other crisis, the GM may say you don't need to roll to activate the power at all—you can use it even with only 1d. That might apply if the task isn't difficult or the outcome isn't significant (see the Cardinal Rules, page 20), if you get to use “loose dice” (page 22), or if you take lots of time (page 29).

Using Your Powers

Using a power in the game is as easy as declaring an action and rolling the appropriate dice. If you get a matching set, you succeed.

Declaration

You must declare *how* you are using your power when you declare. Are you defending? Are you attacking? What Power Capacities, what Extras, what dice types (if you have a choice) are you using? All this must be declared in the declaration phase or it is assumed the fullest array of your ability is being used.

Attacking

Pick your target during the declaration phase of combat; roll your dice during the rolling phase; and if you succeed, calculate and inflict damage on the target in the resolution phase, based on the Extras and bonus Attack Power Quality Levels you might have.

Defending

Choose to defend with your power in the declaration phase (see page 75 for what you can or can't defend against). If you roll a match in the rolling phase, then in the resolution phase you can gobble dice just like a dodge or block roll.

Using Useful Powers

Declare what you want to do with your Useful power. If you roll a match, the width indicates initiative or time spent, and the height indicates quality.

Power Duration

In combat, a power's effects typically last for one round—for one declared action. You declare its action, roll for it, and it takes effect in the resolve phase. At the end of the round, after everyone has acted, it's done. (If your power inflicted damage, of course, that damage stays with the victim until he or she heals, or with an inanimate target until somebody repairs it.)

If your action is simple enough that it doesn't require a roll (see page 20), things are a little easier: You can keep it going as long as you like.

Resistance Rolls

If your power affects another character's body or mind *directly* in any way by attempting to transform or control it, the target can choose to oppose it with a Stat + Skill roll (or just a Stat roll if no Skill applies). This is called a resistance roll. It represents an instinctive reaction against a sudden, unnatural change, so it works a little differently from an ordinary defense roll.

This requires an action in combat, but a target who has already declared some other action can replace it with the resistance roll during the declaration round. The resistance roll replaces whatever the character had previously declared. The resistance roll is always optional; you can always choose to take another action and not resist the transformation. You must decide whether to replace another action with a resistance roll during the declaration phase; after that, your declared action stands.

This circumstance applies when the power attempts to transform or transmute the target, or affect the target's mind or thoughts. It *does not* cover normal attacks; to defend against those, see **Defense Rolls** on page 75.

The resistance roll is treated exactly like a Dodge or another opposed roll—it gobbles dice from the hostile roll.

Which Stat or Skill the player is allowed to roll for resistance depends entirely on the circumstances; it's up to the GM. The target of, say, a mind control power can resist it with a Command + Stability, while someone resisting transmutation to gold can roll their Body + Endurance.

EXAMPLE: You declare you're using your Flame Shield defense and roll 8d, but then the Id declares she's going to attack you with Mindwipe. Since this power affects your

Mind Stat and is attempting to transform it, you can choose to change your declaration from Flame Shield defense to a Command + Stability resistance roll.

If, instead, the Id lifted and threw a bulldozer at you with his Telekinesis—a straightforward attack—you wouldn't get a resist roll at all and could NOT change your declaration.

If you want your power to affect a character without allowing the target to have a resistance roll, take an Extra (like Speeding Bullet on page 129).

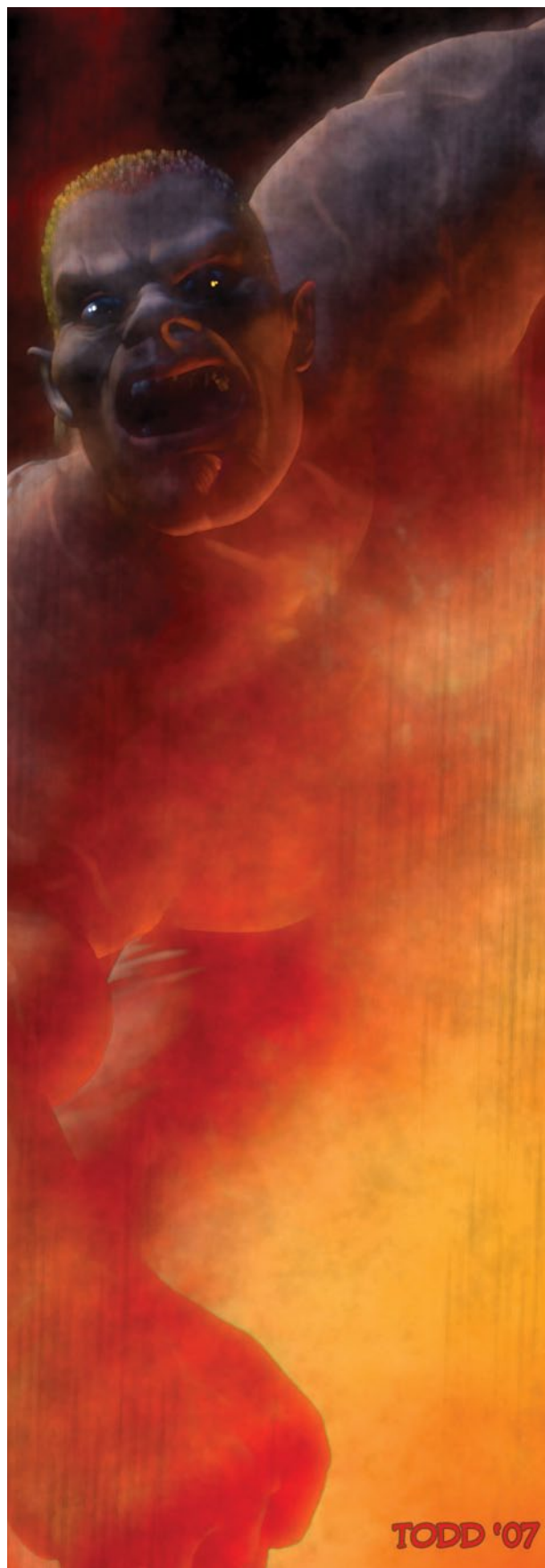
Willpower Costs

As a default in *Wild Talents*, no basic power has a Willpower cost. Some powers do incur Willpower costs, however, because they have Flaws such as Willpower Bid or Willpower Cost (page 136).

In some cases, a power may cost Willpower just because it seems like it's too powerful. If a Miracle sounds like it would unbalance the game, but it's interesting enough that it's worth including, requiring a Willpower cost is a good way to keep it in line.

If that is the case, the necessary Willpower cost does not count as a Flaw, so it does not reduce the cost of the power. It's simply the price of using a power with such a potent effect.

The GM and players should work together to decide if a power deserves a Willpower or Base Will cost. One good candidate is any power that drastically changes the past or that predicts (i.e., predetermines) the future.



Extras and Flaws

Extras and Flaws let you modify a power's effects and cost in even greater detail. An Extra makes the power more, well, powerful, but costs more, while a Flaw reduces the cost but also restricts the power's effects.

Extras

Increasing a power's basic effects—damage, defense, and reliability—is easy: Just add dice or add Power Quality Levels. But if you want more unique changes, Extras give you even more flexibility.

Extras are assumed to be active whenever you use the power, but you can switch them off during the declaration phase of combat. Since this happens in declaration, it *does not* count as an action and does not require a roll.

We'll define the Extras in detail on page 121. Here, we'll explain how they work.

Buying Extras

An Extra increases the power's cost per die. Most Extras add +1 Point per die to the cost. More powerful Extras cost +2 per die. Some cost +3 or even +4.

When you buy an Extra, you buy it for a particular Power Quality. If you want it for all your Power Qualities, add the Extra and its cost to each Power Quality.

EXAMPLE: You want Penetration 2 for your Flame Blast attack. This adds +2 Points to the cost of the Attacks Power Quality (which increases the overall cost of the power as well). This means **ONLY** your Attacks quality has Penetration 2. If you wanted it on your Useful quality as well, it would add +2 Points to the Useful Quality cost as well (thus increasing the overall cost of the power even more).

The Principles of Power

All the Extras, Flaws, and Power Qualities in this book are ultimately just our examples of ways to represent the core concept: Does a power Attack, or Defend, or do Something Else? And is it somehow better or worse than another power that has the same basic quality?

Just as you can go into the fiddly details of all the Extras and Flaws, it's also perfectly valid to take a looser approach.

First, consider each power quality separately, as a distinct power. Is it an Attack power? Or is it a Defends power? Or is it a Useful power?

Consider the pros and cons that make the power in various ways better and worse than a standard power with that quality. When you weigh all the good and bad in this power, is it better than usual? Or is it not quite as good? Assign a value to it with that in mind.

Here are some guidelines.

1 per die: A relatively ineffective power; maybe a "dud," or maybe it's powerful but **REALLY** restricted.

2 per die: A standard Power Quality, or its pros and cons pretty much balance out.

3 or 4 per die: Better overall than a standard Power Quality; maybe a lot better but only in some substantially restricted ways.

5 or 6 per die: Better overall than a standard Power Quality, and with few restrictions.

7 or 8 per die: Far better than usual, with negligible restrictions.

9 or 10 per die: Tremendously more powerful than usual, and with no restrictions.

Do all this in conjunction with the GM and other players. That way the group can come to a fair consensus on how good a power is relative to other powers.

Extras on Hyperstats and Hyperskills

Extras can be purchased and added to Stats and Skills normally, adding to the per-die cost of them in the same way they do for Power Qualities. If a Stat or Skill has an Extra on it, for all intents and purposes it is a Hyperstat or Hyperskill, even if it doesn't have any more dice than usual.

It's possible to take an Extra on some dice of a Stat or a Skill but not on others—Penetration on Brawling Hyperskill dice but not on your normal Brawling dice, for example. The same rules apply as for taking Power Quality Levels on only some dice of a Stat or a Skill; see page 107.

Common Extras

Some Extras are more common than others. Here are some samples. We'll describe them in detail later.

Booster is an Extra that increases Power Capacity dramatically: Each level of Booster multiplies the Power Capacity by 10 at a cost of +1 per die.

Duration is an Extra that makes the power's effect last longer. Usually when you activate a power it works only for that one round. With Duration, it lasts until the end of the current scene or encounter without requiring you to roll again. It costs +2 per die.

Go First is an Extra that makes the power's effects happen more quickly: Each instance of Go First adds +1 to the power's width for determining who goes first at a cost of +1 per die.

Penetration is an Extra for the Attacks quality that reduces the effectiveness of a target's armor. Each level of Penetration costs +1 per die.

Radius is an Extra that applies the power's effects across a 10-yard radius, instead of a single character, at a cost of +2 per die. Each additional level of Radius doubles the radius.

The **Range Capacity** Extra adds the range Power Capacity to a power that has some other capacity, at a cost of +2 per die.

Unusual Extras

Some Extras have more complex effects. Each of them is covered in detail starting on page 121, but we'll summarize them here.

Interference is an Extra that lets the power's dice directly disrupt some other character's action. *On a successful roll* each of your dice becomes a gobble die that removes a die of that height or lower from your target's matching sets, before the target's action takes effect. If you have a 4d power with Interference and you roll 2x7 with it, you can remove up to two dice of height 7 or less from your opponent's set or sets. Interference costs +3 per die.

The **Augment** Extra applies the power's effects to other dice pools; it lets the power augment other actions by adding its dice to some other dice pool. This effect is very powerful, so the Augment Extra has several specific rules that determine how it can be used.

The **Variable Effect** Extra lets you define the effect of the power however you want during the declaration round of combat, rather than having a predetermined effect. With Variable Effect you can use a single Useful Power Quality to turn invisible, or to fly, or to heal yourself, or anything else. Variable Effect costs +4 per die, but you can reduce the cost of the Power Quality by restricting Variable Effect to some particular theme.

Flaws

Restricting a power's basic effects is a Flaw. Each Flaw limits the power and reduces the power's cost per die.

Flaws are *always* on, and can't be switched off by the player.

Like Extras, you buy Flaws for a particular Power Quality. If you want a Flaw for all your Power Qualities, subtract the cost from each Power Quality.

We'll define the Flaws in detail on page 131, but here we'll explain how they work.

Taking Flaws

Most Flaws reduce the cost by 1 per die; a very restrictive Flaw reduces the cost by 2 per die. The minimum cost of a Power Quality, including Flaws, is always 1 Point per die.

Minimum Costs

This is important so we'll say it again: The minimum cost of a Power Quality, including Flaws, is always 1 Point per die.

Flaws on Hyperstats and Hyperskills

Just like Extras, Flaws can be taken on Stats and Skills. (This does, of course—since they are superhuman in nature—make them Hyperstats and Hyperskills.)

Common Flaws

Here's a list of the most common Flaws.

If/Then is the most basic Flaw. With If/Then the power only works in certain circumstances: If the power only works in daylight, or only when you're wearing the color green, or only in the presence of your best friend, take the If/Then Flaw. It reduces the cost by 1 per die.

With the **Attached** Flaw, the power works only if you also use some other power. It reduces the cost by 1 per die.

With the **Depleted** Flaw, the power works only a limited number of times before it must be recharged. It reduces the cost by 1 per die.

With the **Slow** Flaw, the power requires a round of preparation, so it works only every other round. It reduces the cost by 2 per die.

The **Armored Defense** Flaw applies only to the Defends quality. With Armored Defense, the Defends quality doesn't gobble dice from an attack roll. Instead it reduces damage by giving you width in Light Armor Rating (LAR; page 64) on each hit location. It reduces cost by 2 per die.

Trust

Wild Talents lets you do pretty much whatever you want with your powers. Want to be bulletproof? Easy. Grab Heavy Armor from the cafeteria. Want to shoot fire from your fingers? Sounds like Harm with a couple of tweaks. Want the power to put out the Sun? You got it.

Wait. Seriously?

Seriously. Here, we'll even do the math for you.

Suppress Nuclear Fusion (U; 42 per die)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Booster (Mass) +26, Booster (Range) +10, Duration +2, Power Capacity (Range) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Effect: With a successful roll, you can suppress nuclear fusion. With the Duration Extra this lasts for the length of one encounter, or for a few minutes. To increase the duration, replace the Duration Extra with Endless or Permanent.

There you go. Spend a few extra Points for Permanent and you can turn off the Sun forever.

Now, the important question: What are you going to do with that power? You're going to be an ace when it comes to defusing nuclear bombs. And, probably, nobody really knows exactly how much fusion you can suppress, or the fact that you're a threat to the entire solar system. If someone finds out, your life is sure to get interesting.

In *Wild Talents* we trust you, the players, to build the kinds of characters you want to build. The amazing things that *Wild Talents* characters can do are pretty cool. What they *choose* to do, though—that's what really intrigues us.

Special Powers

We reflect unusual powers with various combinations of Extras and Flaws.

Passive Powers

Sometimes you want your defense to be a constant, static reduction of damage, not an active attempt to block attacks—armor, not a shield.

Sometimes you want a power that gives you a damage bonus on some other attack but doesn't use its own separate dice pool—claws that enhance your Brawling, for instance.

For a passive Attacks or Useful power, the Extra Augment (page 123) allows you to apply the benefits of a Power Quality's Extras and Power Quality Levels to some other action.

For a passive Defends power, take the Armored Defense Flaw (page 132), which makes your defense power a form of armor instead of a defense roll. Ordinarily it lasts for one round: You roll to “activate” the power, and the protection begins when your roll takes effect in the resolve phase of the round, and ends at the end of the round. You can extend a power's duration with Extras such as Duration (page 124), Endless (page 125) and Permanent (page 128).

Automatic Powers

What if you want to have a power that activates automatically when some event occurs? Maybe it automatically takes effect when you use some other power, or when you are exposed to the light of the full moon.

Add the Extra called Permanent to a power along with the Flaw called “If/Then” (page 134) and you have a power that is always in effect—but only if a certain condition is met. It takes effect automatically, without requiring a declaration or a roll, using its original activation roll for its effects.

Different Defenses

The Defends quality ordinarily lets you roll the power's dice pool to block or avoid an attack against you. There are several ways to change the Defends quality using Extras and Flaws.

If you want your power to give you a Light Armor Rating, take the Armored Defense Flaw for –2 Points per die. When you activate the power it gives you width in LAR to every hit location. Armored Defense makes the defense vulnerable to weapon Penetration (page 83) unless you also take the Hardened Defense Extra for +1 per die.

If you want your power to give you a Heavy Armor Rating (page 65), take the Interference Extra for +3 Points per die. Each die in the power's successful defense roll acts as a gobble die against an attack against you.

Interference is not vulnerable to weapon Penetration unless you also take the Armored Defense Flaw for –2 per die; when combined with Interference on the Defends quality, Armored Defense does not change the Interference dice but leaves them vulnerable to Penetration.

To guarantee the defense's height and width, take Hard Dice. Defends with Armored Defense is equivalent to 1 LAR per Hard Die. Defends with Interference is equivalent to 1 HAR per Hard Die.

To make the defense last, so you don't have to roll it every single round, add an Extra such as Duration (+2 per die), Endless (+3) or Permanent (+4).

Costs

All powers (Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Miracles) are purchased in dice (regular dice, Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice).

The number of Power Qualities on a power, and their Extras and Flaws, determine its cost per die. This is the most basic cost to buy one *regular* die in that particular power. Double that cost to buy a Hard Die in the same power. Quadruple the basic cost per die to buy a Wiggle Die in the same power.

Power Creation Examples

Let's walk through creation of some basic powers to show you how it all works.

Blink

This is the power to teleport just out of the way of attacks. It doesn't let you travel any distance, but it lets you avoid harm. That's a power with the Defends Power Quality, for 2 Points per die. You can use the power's dice instead of your Coordination and Dodge Skill dice to make a defense roll.

Heavy Armor

The Heavy Armor power uses the Defends Power Quality with a twist. Heavy Armor reduces the width of attack rolls against the target, so unless the attack is enormously lucky or has a Penetration rating, it simply inflicts no damage. To emulate that you can use the Interference Extra, costing +3 per die. Each die of your successful defense roll's set automatically removes one die of that height or less from an attack roll.

Since most Heavy Armor is vulnerable to Penetration, you can also take the Armored Defense Flaw at -2 per die. That means each point of Penetration removes one point of your armor.

You can also apply the Endless Extra at +3 per die, so once you activate the power it stays on until you don't need it anymore.

Use Hard Dice to guarantee that you can gobble dice from any attack roll.

Total cost: 6 Points per die, or 12 per Hard Die.

I'll Never Grow Old

If you want a character who never gets old—you're still vulnerable to injury, disease, starvation, and so on, but you don't get old—take that as a Useful Power Quality. In fact, let's call it a "dud" power. Why a dud? Because it doesn't have much of an impact on the game. Sure, it's cool, but when is it likely to matter in play?

Cost: 1 Point per die. Since it's a background power that you aren't going to deliberately activate, take a pair of Hard Dice in it and you're done. Since it's a dud you don't need to bother with the costs of Extras and Flaws.

Unbreakable Claws

So you want to have normal human strength but to have claws that can tear through solid steel. We could build those as a Miracle, but it's probably more efficient to call them a Hyperskill: We'll build them as enhancements to your Brawling Skill.

Since they're claws they ought to do Killing damage, not the Shock damage that Brawling usually does. Let's add the Extra called Deadly to make them do Killing damage instead of Shock. That adds +1 Point per die.

And the claws need to do a little more damage. A big sword or axe does width + 1 in Killing damage, so let's call it width + 2 for your claws. We can get that by adding two Attacks Quality Levels to Brawling, for +2 Points per die.

A tank hull has a Heavy Armor Rating around 4 or 5, so let's give the claws a Penetration rating of 4 using four instances of the Penetration Extra, for +4 Points per die.

That's a total of +7 Points per die, which brings your total Brawling Skill cost to 9 Points per die.

Chapter 7: Extras

Extras are special modifiers that enhance a power but increase its cost. You can take Extras on any Power Quality to make it more effective.

Unless an Extra's description says otherwise, each Extra, including its cost and effects, applies to *a single Power Quality*. So if you want an Extra to apply to all qualities of a Miracle you need to take it for each one.

Most Extras increase the Power Quality cost by +1, the same as adding a level to the quality. A few Extras have such a broad effect that they cost +2. A very, very few Extras cost even more.

Most of these Extras can be applied to any Power Quality. The exceptions are mentioned in the descriptions.

This list of Extras is not meant to be comprehensive or restrictive; think of it as a list of interesting effects that come up frequently in games with the costs that we think are most appropriate. Feel free to work with the GM and other players

to work up new Extras to suit the powers that you have in mind.

You can generally choose whether or not to use an Extra with its Miracle. If an Extra must be used with its Power Quality, its description says so.

'Players Don't Play Fair!'

Wild Talents has a very flexible power system, built to let you create and play literally any power you want. If you're the GM and you plan to host a traditional superhero slugfest, pay attention to your players' powers, especially their Extras. It doesn't take many Points to have 2hd in a power called, say, "Knock Out All Criminals and Ne'er-Do-Wells in a 100-yard Radius."

If your players insist on being perfectly efficient villain-busting machines, that's all right. Let them bust some villains. Then come up with interesting ways to make it challenging. If the next villain knows he's going to face the big knock-out



power, why would he confront the players face to face? Better to investigate them, find out what motivates them, and hit their Passions and Loyalties until their Willpower drops to zilch and their powers become unreliable. In other words, don't try to stop players from building perfectly efficient powers. Instead, use their perfect powers to drive the game's story in unexpected directions.

Getting Creative

In *Wild Talents* we give you a *ton* of Extras and Flaws so you can tailor any power precisely to your character. Feel free to use them in off-beat ways!

Doing It Yourself

Wild Talents provides you with plenty of pre-made Extras and Flaws. While that's meant to make things easier, it sometimes has the unfortunate effect of making people think that those specific Extras and Flaws are the *only* things you can do to modify a power. They're not. They're just examples. They're a few of our ideas on how to change the effects of a Power Quality. If you have an idea that doesn't quite match one of the Extras or Flaws in this book, you don't need to hammer it into shape or do a lot of crazy math to make it fit. Just make it up.

Does it make a power better? Then it adds +1 to the cost per die. (Or +2 if it's a significant improvement, +3 if it's a seriously impressive improvement, or +4 if it's an amazing improvement.)

Does it make a power worse? Then it subtracts -1 from the cost per die. (Or -2 if it's a significant flaw, -3 if it's a major impairment, or -4 if using the power at all will give you serious pause.)

Think of the Spray Extra. It typically adds dice to an attack and makes multiple actions very easy, like a machine gun spitting hundreds of bullets. But it doesn't have to go on the Attacks Power Quality; you could add it to Defends and get a bunch of simultaneous defenses, or you could add it to a "Create Feathers" Useful quality and create a *whole lot* of feathers at one time.

Then there's the Burn Extra, which sets things on fire after you attack them, so they take additional damage every round. How about we apply that to a telepathic attack? It doesn't set the victim's head on fire, but it keeps inflicting new psychic damage every turn as it uncovers new horrifying fears and torments.

Don't be afraid to tweak anything in this book to suit your tastes.

Ready-to-Play Extras

These Extras define a wide range of powers that are possible in *Wild Talents*. Feel free to use them as written, or modify them to suit your particular character.

Area (+1 per Area die)

Your power explodes, with the same effects as the Area weapon quality (page 82). For particularly nasty attacks, you can take Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice as Area dice. Area Hard Dice cost +2 each instead of the usual +1, and Area Wiggle Dice cost +4 each.

Area is usually taken on Attacks, but you can apply it to the Defends quality (your power explodes when you successfully defend against an attack) or the Useful quality (your power explodes as a side effect) if you want. With Defends or Useful, Area has no range unless you take the Power Capacity (Range) Extra, so make sure you have some way to resist the damage yourself.

Augment (+4)

Your power's dice pool can enhance another dice pool's roll. You don't have to declare that you're using Augment like most Extras; you can decide that you're using it in the roll phase of combat, after you've already rolled for your declared action. Simply add the Augment dice to the dice pool that you just rolled and look for matching dice.

Augment applies to your own actions. To be able to apply it to someone else's actions, add the Power Capacity (Range) Extra.

Augment has some important limitations.

If either power—the Augment power or the one you're augmenting—has Extras (besides Augment, of course) or additional Power Quality Levels, you have a choice. You can turn off the Extras and additional Power Quality Levels and add the dice pools together as above; or you can use all the Extras and Power Quality Levels from both powers but roll only the smaller of the two dice pools. The number of dice is all that matters here, not the types of dice; if you have a 6d pool being augmented by a 2wd Augment power, use the 2wd because that's fewer dice.

The Augment dice can only be added to a dice pool that shares Augment's Power Quality. Augment on the Attacks Power Quality can only boost attack rolls. Augment on the Defends Power Quality can only boost defense rolls. Augment on Useful can boost any action that is neither a defense nor an attack, at the GM's discretion.

Augment does not increase another power's Power Capacities. Always use the Power Capacities of the roll being augmented, not the power with Augment.

EXAMPLE: You take Augment for a power we'll call All-Encompassing Fire, with 3d+2hd+2wd. It has Attacks with Augment and Penetration 2. Let's say you use All-Encompassing Fire to boost your 3d Brawling dice pool.

If you shut off the Extra, you can roll all 6d+2hd+2wd to attack with no Penetration. (Augment does not increase capacity, so your range is only touch—it's a punch!)

If you want to use Penetration 2 on your punch, you must only use your Brawling dice, the smaller of the two dice pools: That's 3d with Penetration 2.

Optional Rule: You can spend Willpower to add the Augment dice and keep all Extras and Power Quality Levels from Augment and the affected power. This costs 1 Willpower per Augment die, 2 per Augment Hard Die, and 4 per Augment Wiggle Die.

About Augment (and Variable Effect)

Augment is a really detailed, fiddly Extra with so many rules that it feels like its own subsystem of the game. In a way it is, because with Augment a power breaks all the normal rules. Instead of rolling its dice to get an effect, you can add its dice to some other roll. It's like gaining Skill dice that you can use on anything.

Variable Effect is another detailed, fiddly Extra that amounts to its own subsystem of the game, again because it makes a miracle break all the normal rules. Instead of a power with a given effect, with Variable Effect your power can be *any* power and *any* effect. Or you can break up the Variable Effect dice pool into multiple powers, each with its own effect.

The point to take away from Augment and Variable Effect is not that *those* are the only ways to approach those ideas, but that it's OK to change the rules. The *Wild Talents* rules are fairly robust. Change them however you need to fit the game you want to play.

Booster (+1)

Each time you take Booster on a Power Quality, it multiplies its Power Capacity by 10. If your Power Quality has more than one capacity, you can decide when you use the power whether Booster applies to one or another; and if you have more than one instance of Booster, you can divide the Booster levels between the capacities however you like each time you use it.

Burn (+2)

Your power sets things on fire, just like the Burn weapon quality (page 83).

Burn is usually taken on Attacks, but you can take it with the Defends quality (you set attackers on fire if you successfully defend against them) or Useful (you set things on fire as a side effect of your power) if you want.

Burn has range only if its Power Quality has the range Power Capacity. Otherwise it affects only those who touch you or whom you touch.

Controlled Effect (+1)

The Miracle affects specific targets or characters, such as friends only, enemies only, yourself only, or others only. (If this is a disadvantage, take it as a Flaw.)

Daze (+1)

Your power reduces the target's dice pool by width in dice for the next round.

Deadly (+1 or +2)

For +1, an attack that ordinarily does width in Shock damage instead does width in Killing; or an attack that ordinarily does width in Killing does width in Shock and Killing. For +2, an attack that does width in Shock instead does width in Shock and Killing.

Disintegrate (+2)

This Extra applies to the Attacks quality. If your attack fills the target hit location or object with

By the Numbers

Want some *really* ambitious benchmarks for your Miracle? These Booster amounts are based on the capacities of a power with four to six dice. You may be able to shave off a Booster level or two if you have a larger dice pool. You can also use the No Upward Limit Extra to get the same effects, at a steep Willpower cost.

Booster	Equivalent Capacity
+5	Distance across the U.S.
+6	Mass of an aircraft carrier
+7	Distance to the Moon
+7	Mass of a skyscraper
+9	Distance to Mars
+10	Distance to the Sun
+10	Mass of the Great Pyramid of Cheops
+13	Speed of light
+15	Range of one light year
+16	Distance to the Fish homeworld (42 light years)
+20	Mass of the Moon
+22	Mass of the Earth
+24	Range to the farthest part of the visible universe
+26	Mass of the Sun

Killing damage, it disintegrates completely and is gone forever.

Duration (+2)

With a single successful roll, your Miracle remains in effect for the rest of the current scene or series of actions or rounds.

The exact duration is fluid and depends on the circumstances; it might be a few rounds or it may be several minutes, or longer if the players and GM agree.

You don't have to concentrate on maintaining the action or roll it again, and can perform other actions while it's still going.

If your Miracle has the Attacks quality, it launches one attack against the same target with the same roll every single round.

If it has Defends, it automatically defends, with the same set, against each attack against you.

If it has Useful, it automatically conducts the same action once per round with the same roll.

Typically, the same action and its rolled set apply throughout this duration, so if you activate your Miracle with a 2x7 it remains active at height 7.

You can voluntarily reroll the power's effect by declaring it again and then rolling a new result in the Roll phase. However, you cannot activate an action with Duration and then "stack" another roll with the same action and a new duration on top of it. The new action's roll replaces the original one.

Two important circumstances change the way Duration works. The first is if your power is conditional—it has some restricted condition under which it works. The second is if your power doesn't roll for its own effect, but instead augments some other roll using the Augment Extra or impedes some other roll using the Interference Extra.

A conditional power with Duration on the Attacks or Useful quality—one that has Flaws such as Attached or If/Then, which restrict when it works—takes effect automatically or reflexively whenever the conditions are right. It is not restricted to a single automatic activation each round, but it cannot activate at all if the conditions are wrong.

Each time the power takes effect it uses the same roll that activated it in the first place. You can stop the power from "going off," but only by making an announcement to that effect in the declaration phase, before the power has a chance to take effect. If you don't declare that you're quashing the power's effects before something triggers it, it takes effect in the Roll phase whether you like it or not.

If your Duration power doesn't roll for its own effect but instead affects some other roll, as with the Augment Extra or the Interference Extra, you must roll its dice anew every time it takes effect. After all, you're not rolling to activate a power but to affect some other action.

See the Extras Endless and Permanent for longer-lasting versions of Duration.

Electrocuting (+1)

This Extra applies only to the Attacks quality. It functions like a limited version of the Engulf Extra. If the attack damages the target—it must inflict at least one point of damage past the target's defenses—that same damage instantly "travels" to adjacent hit locations as it goes to ground, without requiring you to make any more rolls.

The damage follows the shortest route through the target to ground, which usually means the damage goes to lower hit locations, ending at a leg. An electrocuting attack that does damage to a human-shaped target's head or arm also inflicts damage to the torso and one leg; if it does damage to a target's torso it also inflicts damage to one leg.

Endless (+3)

With a successful roll, your Miracle remains in effect indefinitely, even if you're asleep, until you choose to deactivate it. You don't need to roll to deactivate it; a simple declaration will do.

See the Duration Extra for details about ongoing powers.

Engulf (+2)

Your Miracle affects every hit location of the target simultaneously. If the power is an attack, it inflicts the same damage to every hit location. Engulf does not give you additional rolls; a single defense roll is enough to block or deflect an Engulf attack altogether.

Go First (+1)

Go First increases the width of your Miracle's roll by 1 for determining initiative in the Resolve phase. You can take it multiple times for a greater bonus.

Hardened Defense (+2)

This Extra applies to the Defends quality if it also has the Armored Defense Flaw. With Hardened Defense, your Armored Defense's LAR is not reduced by Penetration.

High Capacity (Type) (+1)

This Extra applies when a Power Quality has more than one Power Capacity. With High Capacity, one particular Power Capacity always has its maximum capacity. You don't have to devote dice to it at all when combining capacities.

EXAMPLE: You have 5d with a Power Quality with the Mass capacity, the Speed capacity, the Range capacity, and High Capacity (Mass). Your power can always lift the maximum amount of mass for those 5d, and still divide the full 5d of capacity among Speed and Range.

Interference (+3)

Interference allows your power to reduce the width of an opposed roll *before* the resolution of all rolls. This is an extremely powerful effect in the game.

You must declare you're using Interference to oppose another character's roll during the declaration phase of combat, and make a successful roll in the roll phase (see page 28 for opposed rolls; see page 75 for how opposed defense rolls work). On a success, in the resolution phase your Interference roll reduces the width of the opposed roll by its width *before any other roll is parsed*.

Your Interference roll's height must match or exceed the height of the roll that you're opposing. Unlike an ordinary opposed roll, however, it does

Endless: When Do You Roll?

Remember the Cardinal Rules for the One-Roll Engine on page 20? You roll dice only when the situation is challenging and the results are important. That's important to bear in mind with an Endless or Permanent power.

Let's say you have a 2d power with Endless. Can't you just roll those 2d over and over until you get 2x10, and make *that* your Endless set? Nope. You roll only when the situation is challenging and the results are important. That means you roll dice during the game, when there are real consequences for success or failure. When that's the case, roll your power's dice. If you get a set, that's its Endless height and width—until important things are on the line once more and you need to roll it again.

Now, here's a fun twist: You finally get a chance to roll that Endless or Permanent power and you score that 2x10. Can you spend a point of Base Will to increase the width of the roll, making it 3x10? Here's the short answer: Ask the GM. Spending Base Will should always and only be a function of extreme in-character stress and desperation. If the circumstances are important enough that they call for a roll, and desperate enough that you need to spend Base Will, then go ahead and boost that long-lasting set. But if things aren't all that dire and you just don't want to pay the points for Hard Dice, don't do it.

not need to match or beat the width of the roll you're opposing; it happens before any other actions take place. This makes Interference a really, really effective opposed roll.

The kinds of actions your power can oppose with Interference is always up to the GM. Interference on

a Defends Power Quality usually opposes attack rolls; Interference on a Useful Power Quality usually opposes noncombat rolls, depending on the nature and description of your power and the action you're trying to oppose. Interference on Attacks can oppose just about any kind of action, but the GM is encouraged to play up unintended consequences when you, say, distract someone with blasts of supernova fire.

Long-Term Interference: A Power Quality that has Interference and also is a long-term effect, through an Extra such as Duration, is an automatic defense or “jinx.” It applies the same Interference result separately against each opponent that's affected by your power.

Long-term Interference on Defends represents armor, a force field, or some other static protection: It applies separately to any attack against you.

Long-term Interference on Useful or Attacks constantly interferes with some particular kind of action. Exactly what kind of action is up to you and your GM, and depends entirely on the nature of your power and your description of it in the declaration phase; it helps to describe the effects of your Interference power with enough detail that it's fairly obvious what it opposes and what it does not.

EXAMPLE: You declare you're going to attack your enemy, Freezerburn, with Flame Blast. Freezerburn declares he is going to block it with Ice Shield, which is a Defends Power Quality with Interference.

You roll 4x8 with Flame Blast. Freezerburn rolls 3x9 with Ice Shield.

Your Flame Blast's width is greater than the Ice Shield's, so if it was a standard defense roll your blast would go through before the Ice Shield took effect.

But with Interference, Ice Shield works a little differently. Its height is greater than or equal to your Flame Blast's height, so each of the dice in the Ice Shield set removes one die

from your Flame Blast set, regardless of your attack's speed. Your Flame Blast drops to 1x8, which is a miss.

Native Power (+1)

Your power is not a superpower at all, but a native ability as natural to you as walking or talking is to a normal person. You do not lose dice from this power if your Willpower reaches zero, and you do not lose this power if a power like Nullify disrupts your Archetype's Sources or Permissions.

No Physics (+1)

Your power ignores all the usual laws of physics that ordinarily apply to you even when you're using a Miracle—gravity, inertia, leverage, and so on. You could use it to make impossibly sharp turns regardless of speed, use your superhuman strength to stop a truck cold without destroying it, or lift a car by its bumper without tearing the bumper off.

No Upward Limit (+2)

You can spend Willpower to enhance your power. For every point of Willpower you spend, you can double your power's mass, range or speed capacity. For every 2 Willpower, you can quadruple your mass, range or speed capacity or add +1 to the width of your roll. If you have the Radius Extra, you can double the power's radius for 8 Willpower. There's no limit to the amount of Willpower you can spend to increase the power's capacity or width—you can even extend the width of your roll beyond the size of your dice pool—but you must spend the Willpower before you roll.

Non-Physical (+2)

This Extra applies only to the Attacks quality. Typically a standard defense roll deflects or avoids the attack as usual, but a static defense that you don't have to roll—body armor, or a “Defends” Power Quality with Interference or Armored Defense

and either Duration, Endless or Permanent—simply does not apply. If there's any doubt, it's up to the GM.

If an ordinary defense roll won't block the attack, you must define some reasonably common factor that can protect against your attack but would not protect against a physical attack. The GM and players should decide what counts as "reasonable."

For example, a mental attack might be blocked if the target succeeds at a Stability roll against the attack, while a non-physical gamma ray blast might be blocked by lead shielding, the Hardened Defense Extra, or anything that keeps out radiation.

If your power has this Extra, it always applies. You can't choose whether or not to use it. To have a version of Attacks without it on the same power, take another instance of the Attacks quality (page 106).

On Sight (+1)

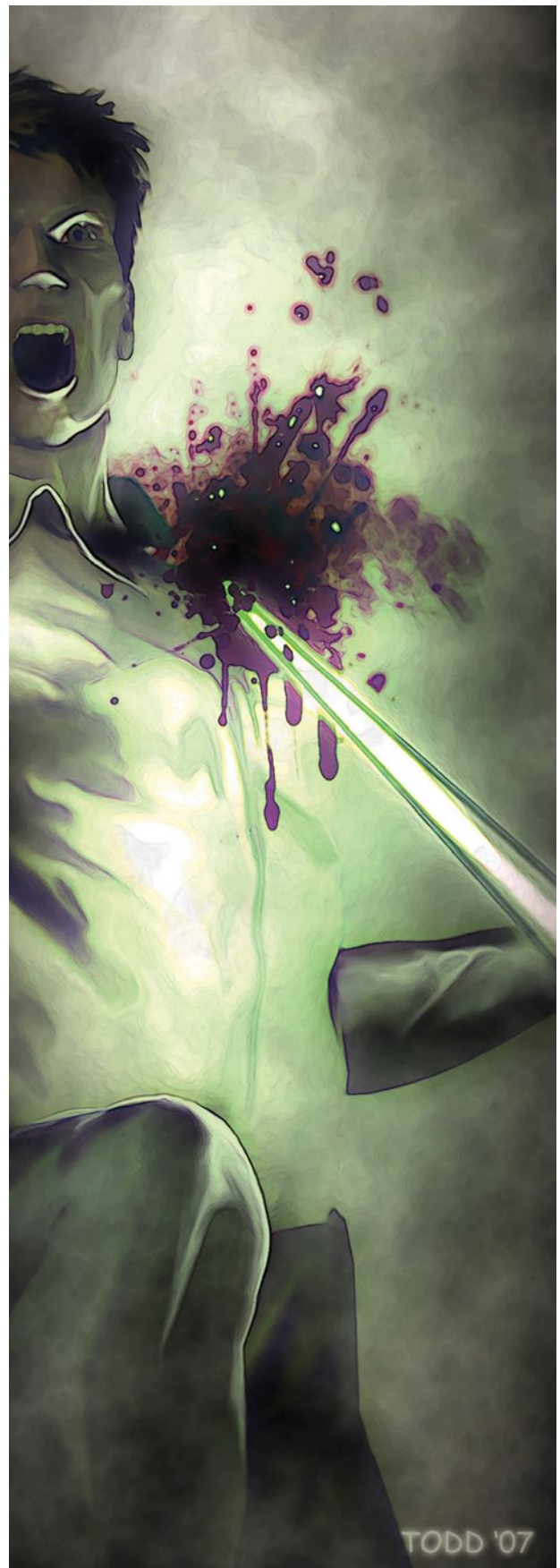
Your ranged power can affect anyone or anything you can see within range, even if you don't have line of sight. It works even if you're looking at the subject through an intermediary such as a camera, mirror, or power that allows remote viewing.

Penetration (+1)

This Extra applies only to the Attacks quality. Your attack reduces the target's armor ratings (HAR and LAR) by 1. You may take Penetration multiple times to reduce armor further.

Permanent (+4)

Once you activate your power, it stays on permanently unless you deliberately shut it off. It is not affected if you run out of Willpower or Base Will. If you activate a Permanent power and then get killed, the power will keep going. See the Duration Extra, page 124, for other details about ongoing powers.



Adding Permanent to a power that also has Attached or If/Then is a handy way to create a power that automatically activates when you use some other power.

If you want a power that is *truly* permanent, one that you can't deliberately shut down, add a -1 Flaw called "Always On."

Power Capacity (Type) (+1 or +2)

Your Power Quality has another Power Capacity (see page 109). If it's mass, range or speed, this Extra costs +2; if it's touch, the cost is +1.

Radius (+2)

Your Miracle affects all possible targets within a 10-yard (10-meter) sphere around the point where it takes effect. Each additional instance of the Radius Extra doubles its size: 20 yards at +4, 40 yards at +6, and so on. If your power incurs a Willpower cost, it applies once for each target affected in the radius.

Speeding Bullet (+2)

Your power can't easily be resisted or avoided. In order to get a roll to oppose it, the target must have six or more dice in an appropriate Stat—typically Coordination to oppose an Attacks quality with Speeding Bullet, or Mind, Sense or Command to oppose a Useful quality with Speeding Bullet. On-going static protection such as armor or a defense with Duration applies normally.

Spray (+1)

Your power has the Spray quality, like a weapon (page 83). It adds +1d to your roll, and allows you to attempt any number of multiple actions with the power without penalty. You may take this Extra multiple times to gain additional Spray dice. You may even take Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice in Spray for particularly dangerous attacks or effective actions; each Spray Hard Die

costs +2 instead of +1, and each Spray Wiggle Die costs +4.

The Augment Extra is another way to add dice to a roll.

Subtle (+1)

Your power usually goes unnoticed. Anyone within 10 yards (10 meters) can notice it only with a Perception roll.

Traumatic (+1)

This Extra applies only to the Attacks quality. Your attack power is terrifying. If you use it to damage an enemy, causing at least one point of damage past defenses, the target must make a Trauma Check or suffer mental trauma (page 63). Unfortunately, deliberately causing that much trauma forces you to make a Trauma Check, too.

Variable Effect (+4)

You can change the effects of your Power Quality. With a successful roll to activate the power—this cannot be an actual attack, defense or other use, just a roll to activate it—you may designate some or all of the dice of your Variable Effect power to temporarily "become" dice for some other effect.

This emulated power is good for a single action unless you extend it with an Extra such as Endless. You must declare that you're using Variable Effect, and what you're emulating with it, in the declaration phase.

If you can use the Power Quality *only* for Variable Effect, apply the If/Then Flaw.

Using Variable Effect: You don't actually lose the dice from your Variable Effect power, but as long as you are using them to emulate another power you can't use them for Variable Effect itself or to emulate some other effect on the same Power Quality.

The emulated effect uses the dice of the original power; you can't "change" dice types. If you

have no Hard Dice in the source power, you can have no Hard Dice in an emulated power.

As with all Extras, you must purchase Variable Effect separately for each Power Quality that you want it to affect. You cannot change the effect of a Power Quality that doesn't have the Variable Effect.

To emulate a Skill die, you must have Variable Effect on the Power Quality that matches that Skill. To emulate Stat dice, your power must have Variable Effect on all three Power Qualities, Attacks, Defends and Useful.

Multiple Effects: Each use of a Power Quality with Variable Effect to emulate some other version of that Power Quality requires its own action. That means that if you want to emulate three Power Qualities at once, you need to do it with multiple actions or else do it in stages, one roll per round.

If you want to be much more efficient at emulating powers, add the Permanent Extra to a Power Quality that has Variable Effect, and add the Attached Flaw to link it to another Power Quality that has Variable Effect. When you activate the "primary" quality, the one that's Attached to it also activates automatically. (See Automatic Powers, page 119.)

Power Capacities: Because you're not rolling for its own effect, a Power Quality with Variable Effect has no capacity for range, speed or mass. But its emulated power has a range, speed or mass capacity, as usual.

Power Qualities, Extras and Flaws: If the Variable Effect Power Quality has other Power Quality Levels, Extras or Flaws, they do not "transfer" over to the emulated power; they apply only to the use of the Variable Effect Power Quality itself. The emulated power starts from scratch.

You may add Extras and Power Quality Levels to an emulated power by paying Willpower equal to their Point value.

For example, let's say you emulate a 4d Attacks power and you add the Extra No Upward Limit and three Attacks levels. No Upward Limit costs +2 Points per die and three Attacks quality levels cost +3 per die. To add them to the emulated power costs 5 Willpower per emulated die, or 20 Willpower for a 4d power.

You may reduce the Willpower cost of adding Extras and quality levels to an emulated power effect by adding Flaws to it, to a minimum Willpower cost of 0. (Sorry, but you can't give yourself Willpower points by taking more Flaws on an emulated power effect than it has Extras.)

Power themes: In many characters, the power effects emulated with Variable Effect must tie in somehow with a broad theme. If this is the case, use the If/Then Flaw to specify what theme your power must follow. If you have a power with Variable Effect with If/Then (fire theme), you could use Variable Effect to change its Useful quality so it manipulates fire, or to modify the Extras of its fiery Attacks quality, but you couldn't change it to something non-fire-related. If in doubt, talk to the GM.

Variable Effect is a great way to represent characters with very flexible powers. See the "cafeteria Miracles" Alternate Forms (page 140), Cosmic Power (page 142) and Gadgeteering (page 145) for some examples.

8: Flaws

Flaws limit a power but make it less expensive. Most Flaws can be applied to any Power Quality. The exceptions are mentioned in the descriptions. However, **no Flaw is worth any Points if it does not somehow restrict that Power Quality.** If you can't come up with a good example of how the Obvious Flaw hurts your power's Defends quality, then don't take Obvious with Defends.

Unless a Flaw's description says otherwise, each Flaw, including its cost and effects, applies to *a single Power Quality*. So if you want a Flaw to apply to all qualities of a Miracle you should take it for each one.

Most Flaws reduce the Power Quality cost by -1 pt per die, the same as removing a level from a Power Quality. A few Flaws have such a broad effect that they reduce it by -2 or even more.

Flaws can never reduce the cost of any Power Quality, Stat or Skill below 1 per die.

Flaws always apply. You cannot choose whether or not to be restricted by them.

What's It Worth?

Because you apply Flaws on individual Power Qualities, they can add up in value pretty quickly. A -1 Flaw applied to all three Power Qualities saves you -3 on the power's total cost per die.

The "standard" Flaw is therefore worth -1. That indicates a moderate restriction on your power; not a constant problem but potentially debilitating if the circumstances aren't right.

A Flaw that's worth -2 is a major restriction. It consistently constrains your use of the power, or makes using the power so difficult that you can't use it very often.

Between these two categories there's a lot of gray area. Sometimes you have multiple minor restrictions in mind that individually don't add up to



more than -1, but which don't seem worth what they get you all together.

If your Supreme Sorcerer has to both chant strange phrases and make strange hand gestures in order to use his powers, is that worth two Flaws? It depends. If the limitation is so widely known that he's likely to have his hands tied or his mouth gagged any time enemies come after him, then that sounds like a -2 Flaw. Otherwise, even the two requirements together are probably worth only -1.

Remember, a Flaw must somehow restrict you to be worth any Points at all. That can have some tricky ramifications when you have one power that's based on another one. Let's say you have a power called Fire Blast with the Attacks quality and the Flaw "If/Then (must have oxygen)". You also have a power called Explosion that adds effects to Fire Blast. You can't take the Flaw "If/Then (must have oxygen)" on Explosion, because that Flaw doesn't add any new restriction. If there's no oxygen, you can't use Fire Blast, and if you can't use Fire Blast then you can't use Explosion. The Flaw gives you Points on Fire Blast but is redundant, and therefore worthless, on Explosion. It doesn't add any restriction.

When in doubt, the players and GM should work together to determine the value of a Flaw or a group of Flaws.

Ready-to-Play Flaws

This list of Flaws is not meant to be comprehensive or restrictive; think of it as a list of interesting effects that come up frequently in games with the costs that we think are most appropriate. Feel free to work with the GM and other players to work up new Flaws to suit the powers that you have in mind.

Always On (-1)

This Flaw combines with the Permanent Extra: You can't deactivate your power.

Armored Defense (-2)

This Flaw applies to the Defends quality. Your Defends quality does not have its own roll to gobble attack dice, and its additional Power Quality Levels do not boost defense rolls. Instead, it provides its width in LAR on every hit location, and each additional Defends level adds +1 LAR.

The armor ratings of a power with Armored Defense are subject to Penetration unless you also take the Hardened Defense Extra (page 126).

If you have the Interference Extra along with Armored Defense, Defends works like Heavy Armor (see Interference, page 126), but the Armored Defense Flaw makes the power susceptible to Penetration. In that case Armored Defense's roll does not provide LAR, because its dice are used for Interference.

Attached (-1 or -2)

A power with Attached takes effect only when you use another power or a particular Stat or Skill. You still must roll for each; you can take the primary action in one round and the Attached power the next, or use both in one round with multiple actions. Take the Duration, Endless or Permanent Extra to have the attached power "go off" automatically when you use its associated Stat or power. Attached is worth -2 if it applies only when you use a specific Miracle or Skill. If Attached applies when you use a particular Stat (which can be used with multiple Skills), it's worth -1.

It's possible to take the Attached Flaw more than once, if your power requires more than one "source" power to be active.

Automatic (–1)

This Flaw applies to a power with the Attached Flaw. The Power Quality with Automatic takes effect every time you use its Attached power, automatically, whether you want it or not. You must declare and roll for the Attached power alongside the power that triggered it, unless it's already activated via the Duration or Endless Extra. Automatic is worth no Points as a Flaw if you have the Permanent Extra; if your power is permanent, it's automatically on already!

Backfires (–2)

Every time you use your power, you take a point of Killing damage to the torso (or whatever counts as your core hit location).

Base Will Cost (–4)

To activate your power you must spend one point of Base Will. You lose this Base Will point permanently. If you fail to activate the power for any reason, you do not lose the Base Will.

Delayed Effect (–2)

Your power takes a while to take effect. Exactly how long this takes depends on the nature of the power and the situation, and is up to you and the GM; a power with more Extras should take longer to have its complete effect than one with just the basic Power Qualities. A Delayed Effect attack may dole its damage out at one point per round, or it may wait and deliver all its damage at the end of the scene or encounter. A Delayed Effect defense may take a few minutes to “charge up.”

Depleted (–1)

Your power has a limited number of uses that must be recharged, reloaded, refreshed or otherwise replaced. Each time that you attempt to use a power takes one charge.

The more charges your power has, the fewer times it can be recharged. The default is one charge per die in the power, with one available recharge per die in the power. You can increase the number of charges by reducing the number of recharges. With half the recharges, each recharge has double the charges.

For example, let's say you have 6d in a power. Ordinarily that's six charges with six recharges, for 36 total uses. You could halve the number of recharges and double the number of charges in each, for 12 charges with three recharges, or triple the number of charges but have only a third as many recharges—18 charges with only 2 recharges. The total number of uses is always the same.

Ordinarily, each Power Quality with Depleted has its own set of charges. You can have them all share one set of charges with the If/Then Flaw.

It takes one round to recharge a depleted power. This typically doesn't require a roll but it counts as an action if you want to do more than that in a single round.

When you're out of recharges, you must take some significant in-character action to regain the use of your power. Exactly what you must do depends on your character, but it usually shouldn't take more than an hour or so; work out a reasonable recharge method with the GM and other players. Maybe you must fly back to your home to swap batteries, or maybe you must plug into a wall for an hour, or maybe you must sit in crystal-clear sunlight for a while.

You generally can't take Depleted on a power that's Attached to a power that already has the Depleted Flaw, unless the Attached power would have fewer charges than the primary power; if the primary power runs out first you can't use the Attached power anyway, so Depleted would not impair it and would therefore be worth no Points as a Flaw.

Direct Feed (–2)

Every time you use your power, you lose width in Willpower points. The better you do with it, the more Willpower you lose.

Exhausted (–3)

You can use your power only once in a particular encounter or scene.

Focus (–1)

Your power is contained in an external object and can't be used without it. When you use the power it obviously comes from the focus.

The focus can be taken away if you're unconscious or helpless. If you do lose it, you can only replace it between adventures, after a significant amount of time, or in some restricted circumstances; work with the GM to figure out what's appropriate.

You can choose whether your focus is usable by others or not. If it is, it's usable by anyone, friend or foe.

The focus itself can be attacked even without taking it from you. You must designate one hit location number where the focus can be attacked with a called shot. An ordinary hit on that number still hits you, not the focus, but if an enemy wants to target the focus itself that's the number he or she needs to target.

A focus has its own hit boxes and armor points. It has one wound box for every die (of any kind) in each Power Quality with the same Focus Flaw. Use the Heavy Armor power to give the focus a Heavy Armor Rating.

For example, the rural inventor Doc Stockton has a Miracle called Rusting Raygun, 5d+2hd. With a total of seven dice it has seven wound boxes.

It's possible to have more than one power included in a single focus. In that case each power should have the Focus Flaw. However, each power

should be treated as a separate “part” of the overall focus, with its own wound boxes.

See page 136 for a list of optional focus Extras and Flaws.

Fragile (–1)

Your power instantly stops working if you take any damage or if you suffer some other serious distraction; anything that inflicts a gobble die penalty (see page 25) also shuts down your power. You can attempt to use it again the next round.

Full Power Only (–1)

You can never “scale back” your power's effects. It always affects the maximum possible Power Capacity, rolls its maximum dice pool, and (with an attack) inflicts maximum possible damage.

Go Last (–1)

The Power Quality takes effect last in the combat round; treat it as “width 1” for determining initiative.

Horrifying (–1)

Your power appalls witnesses. Any Charm rolls that you attempt with characters who have seen your power work are at +1 Difficulty for each Power Quality that has this Flaw. For example, if you have three Power Qualities with the Horrifying Flaw, after you use the power your Charm rolls are at +3 Difficulty, for a base Difficulty of 4. You gradually lose this penalty with a character who becomes accustomed to you and your use of the power; how long this takes is up to the GM.

If/Then (–1)

Your power requires some condition—or the absence of some condition—for it to work. Maybe you must say the Lord's prayer, or maybe it doesn't work in the presence of a certain color or in the presence of other people, or maybe it doesn't work

against certain types of characters, or maybe you must be in a certain mood. If the circumstances aren't right, the power doesn't work. A particular restrictive version might be worth -2 if the GM agrees.

If the GM agrees, you can also use If/Then to specify when some particular part of a power doesn't work—when it has a particular Power Capacity, for example, or when it can use an Extra.

Limited Damage (-1)

This Flaw applies to the Attacks Extra. Your power inflicts only one kind of damage, either width in Shock or width in Killing. You must choose which kind of damage the power inflicts when you create the power.

Limited Width (-1)

No matter what you roll, your power has an effective width of 1. It still takes effect if you roll a set, but treat its width as 1 for speed, damage and all other effects.

Locational (-1)

Your power is tied to a particular hit location. If that hit location takes any Shock or Killing damage, your power fails but you can reactivate it the next round. If that hit location is filled with Shock or Killing damage, you cannot use the power at all. You can take Locational multiple times to apply it to multiple hit locations. If Locational applies to three hit locations it's worth -3, but your power fails if any of those locations takes any damage.

Loopy (-1)

Your power disorients you, causing you to wander in a stupor until you make a Stability roll. You can attempt the roll once per round. This Flaw gets you no Points if you have two or more Hard Dice or any Wiggle Dice in Command or Stability.

Mental Strain (-2)

Every time you use your power, you suffer a point of Shock damage to the head.

No Physical Change (-1)

Whatever your power appears to do, really it causes no physical change to the world. If you're invisible, you're only invisible in the minds of those who see you, and you still are picked up by cameras and motion sensors; with an attack power, you cause pain that could debilitate or kill the victim, but the victim also can throw off the power's effects and recover from all damage.

A target who knows or suspects your power is at work can resist the power's effects by rolling Resistance against your power roll and spending a point of Willpower. (This requires a declaration and roll in the appropriate combat phases.)

Obvious (-1)

There is no way to use your power without drawing attention to yourself. Maybe it glows brilliantly, causes a loud noise, or exudes a stench—when you use it, everybody nearby knows about it. Define the effect when you build your power.

One Use (-4)

Your power works once, then it's gone and you cannot use it again, ever. You can only regain it by taking it as a new power through character advancement (page 56). This Flaw applies only if you actually use the power; if you fail to activate your power for any reason, it is not used up.

Reduced Capacities (-1)

The Power Quality's capacities are reduced to one tenth normal: 10 lbs instead of 100 lbs, 64 yards instead of 640 yards, and so on.

Scattered Damage (-1)

This Flaw applies only to the Attacks quality. Each point of damage inflicted by the power affects a different hit location; roll 1d10 for each point of damage and apply it to the hit location indicated on that die. (If splitting the damage up actually improves the power, treat this as a +1 Extra instead.)

Self Only (-3)

You can use your power to affect only yourself. This is typically taken on a Useful Power Quality (although you can take it on Attacks if you really want); it cannot be taken with the Defends quality, which affects only you by default (see page 109). You get no Points for the Touch Only Flaw if you have Self Only.

Slow (-2)

You can use the power only every other round. The first time you use it in an encounter you can use it immediately, but after that you must wait a round between each attempt to use it. You can take other actions while waiting.

Touch Only (-2)

A Power Quality with Touch Only has no range, speed or mass capacities (see page 109); no matter how many Power Qualities its power has, it has no range and affects no mass beyond what you can touch and lift. You cannot take this Flaw on a Power Quality that already is limited to the “touch” or “self” Power Capacities

Uncontrollable (-2)

Your power has a mind of its own. Once you activate it, the GM decides exactly what it does and when. You can shut it off only with a dynamic roll of the power’s dice against your initial activation roll.

Willpower Bid (-1)

To activate your power you must “bid” one point of Willpower. If you fail to activate the power for any

reason, you lose the Willpower point. If the power activates, you keep the Willpower point.

Willpower Cost (-2)

To activate your power you must spend Willpower equal to 1 per die that you roll, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die. If you fail to activate the power for any reason, you do not need to spend the Willpower.

Willpower Investment (-1)

To activate your power you must “invest” Willpower equal to 1 per die that you roll, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die. This invested Willpower returns when your power’s duration is over, even if it’s only single action, but until then you must treat it as if you lost that Willpower. If you fail to activate the power for any reason, you do not need to invest the Willpower.

Focus Extras and Flaws

These optional Extras and Flaws add detail and depth to a power focus.

Accessible (-1)

The focus can be taken away with a disarm attack, and if you’ve been grappled and pinned it can be wrestled out of your hand with an opposed Brawling roll.

Adaptation (-2)

Rather than a thoroughgoing innovation, your focus is an improvement on some pre-existing technology. Use the mundane version’s wound boxes and capacities (you can instead use your dice pool capacity by taking the Power Capacity Extra), but use the Miracle’s dice pool, Power Qualities and Extras.

Booby-Trapped (+1)

The focus is built to hurt anyone who activates it without permission. If the user fails to fit the crite-

Building Vehicles

Forget rayguns and powered armor; real heroes have flying cars! Here's how it works.

Build a set of Miracles to reflect what the vehicle can do. Start with some Body dice Attached to the vehicle focus to define just how much weight your vehicle can carry around. Use the movement rules for the Body Stat (page 45) to start off, and add the Booster Extra to let it go faster.

If it should fly, add the Flight Miracle. If it has cameras that let you see in the dark, add the Perceive Miracle. If it has guns, add Harm. You get the idea.

Heavy Armor and Extra Tough are good for vehicles that should stand up to punishment. All characters inside the vehicle are protected by any defensive powers or immunities that the vehicle has, unless the defensive power has a Flaw that says otherwise.

For each power—each that isn't built with an Indestructible Focus, that is—assign a specific hit location on the vehicle. The vehicle gets 10 hit location numbers, just like a character. Each Miracle gets its own hit location and its own wound boxes under the Focus rules. Assign one hit location number to seating—the cab where the driver(s) sit—and another to a space for cargo or additional passengers. If any damage hits those hit locations, it goes to one piece of cargo or a passenger; roll or draw straws to see who takes the hit.

Divide the other hit location numbers however you like among the vehicle's various powers, treating them each like a separate focus; if the location for the Body Stat is destroyed, the vehicle cannot move.

ria—a particular code word, a DNA match, whatever you and the GM and other players deem appropriate—the largest Attacks power in the focus automatically attacks the user. This attack occurs once per use of the focus.

A character with some appropriate Skill or power (Alchemy, Engineering, Gadgeteering, whatever the GM deems acceptable) can deactivate the trap by making an opposed roll against the largest dice pool in the power. If the roll succeeds, the booby trap no longer works until you or someone with the same Skill turns it back on. If the roll fails, the tinkerer suffers the same attack as for using the focus.

Bulky (–1)

The focus is too large for you to carry it around. It's not too heavy to lift, but it's bulky; you lose 1d from any dice pool while carrying it. It can move under its own power if you attach a movement power such as Flight to it.

Crew (–1)

The focus requires a crew of operators for it to work. Each level of the Crew Flaw doubles the number of operators required: With one level of Crew it requires two operators, with two levels it requires four, and so on.

Delicate (–1)

The focus has half the normal number of wound boxes (round down, with a minimum of one). If the focus only has one wound box anyway, you get no Points for this Flaw.

Durable (+1)

The focus has twice the normal number of wound boxes (two per die).

Environment-Bound (–1)

The focus functions only in a specific environment, such as the presence of air or only underwater.

Friends Only (+2)

The focus is usable by others, but only a specific group of people that you choose. This might be a single best friend, or all members of a particular species, or anyone who knows the password, or whatever you want. This advantage is not wholly foolproof—it's possible for a stranger to trick the focus with a lot of effort and planning. Exactly what that requires is up to you, the GM and the other players. But ordinarily the focus can be used only by the people you designate.

Immutable (–1)

The powers contained in the focus cannot be changed in any way.

Indestructible (+2)

The focus cannot be damaged or destroyed by ordinary means. However, you must work out with the GM and other players some specific, difficult but not impossible means that will destroy it.

Irreplaceable (–2)

The focus cannot be replaced.

Manufacturable (+2)

Others can study and reproduce your focus—but only with a tremendous amount of work on your part.

To allow another Talent to reproduce the focus, you must pay Willpower equal to the total cost of all powers in the focus, and then spend a point of Base Will. (If the recipient helps you build the focus, he or she can donate Willpower to help; see page 52.) This is equivalent to gaining a new power in the middle of some desperate action (page 57); but in this case you don't gain the new power, somebody else does! Once you've given the focus away, it can be replicated by other Talents, who must spend the same Willpower but do not need to spend Base Will. The GM can decide what happens to it next; maybe it goes into long-term study,

or maybe in a few months you start seeing knock-offs in stores everywhere as shops full of Talents pool their Willpower and turn the focus out in mass quantities.

As an alternative, you can train non-Talents to create the focus, with an eye toward making it a piece of technology available at large. This is much more difficult. First, you must spend Base Will equal to half the total Point cost of the focus. Each point of Base Will spent in this way requires one month of game time spent drafting plans, building computer simulations and instructing engineers and scientists. In addition you must give up the focus itself, losing all the Points you paid for it (or all the Willpower if you built it with the Gadgeteering Miracle).

After all this, the focus may be reproduced by non-Talent engineers, and anybody who can afford it can get it without paying Points—it has become a ubiquitous object like a shovel, flashlight, or gun.

Operational Skill (+0)

You must have a particular Skill to use the focus. Use the lower of the two dice pools, either the focus' power or the Skill. If you have Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice in the Skill dice pool, however, you can use them even if the focus itself has no Hard Dice or Wiggle Dice.

Secret (+1)

The focus is hidden and its powers appear to come directly from you. Other characters can discover the secret only by extended close observation.

Unwieldy (–1 or –2)

All actions with this focus are limited to a maximum width of 2 for initiative purposes only. This does not affect damage or any other functions of width. With the –2 version of this Flaw, all actions with this focus and all physical actions you take, even ones that don't involve this focus, are limited to width 2 for initiative purposes.

Focus Example

The M-23 Infantry Combat Weapon became the standard combat rifle of the U.S. military in the 1970s, using magnetic acceleration to fire small, dense projectiles with enormous force and speed and very little recoil, with a staggering rate of fire. Invented by a Talent, the rifle was first studied by other Talents and then reproduced as a service weapon. This is how it was built as a Miracle.

M-23 Rifle 10d (A+2; 1 per die; 10 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Focus (Accessible, Adaptation, Manufacturable, Operational Skill (Rifle)) -2, Obvious -1.

Effect: The M-23 has the Attacks quality with Operational Skill that uses the Rifle Skill, which means the shooter uses the lower of his Rifle dice pool or the M-23's 10d dice pool. The Obvious Flaws reflect the rifle's tremendous noise. This allows single shots on semi-automatic, and each hit does width + 2 in Shock and Killing damage. The M-23 was an adaptation of the M-16 assault rifle, so it has the M-16's effective range of 50 yards.

Note that it does not have the Depleted Flaw. The magazine holds 200 rounds and a soldier typically carries four magazines (the bullets are small), so running out of ammo is not much of a risk. It's more a roleplaying challenge; if you've fired 15 to 20 bursts with the rifle, you ought to take a round to reload, and the GM is encouraged to declare that the gun simply overheats and jams if the player refuses.

Attached Power: Recoilless Autofire 4d+1wd (A+2; 4 per die; 32 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Attached (M-23) -2, Augment +4, If/Then (must declare Augment in the declare phase) -1, If/Then (Wiggle Die requires a rolled set) -1.

Effects: The M-23's recoilless ammunition gives it a tremendous rate of fire: It has a Spray rating of 4d+1wd, although the Wiggle Die only applies if the shooter rolls a set with other dice, and unlike most uses of Augment you must announce that you're using the autofire in the declare phase of combat. (We could have used the Spray Extra to give it more dice, but in this case attaching it as a separate power worked just as well for fewer Points.)



9: A Miracle Cafeteria

We've shown you the rules for cooking up any power you want. Here's a cafeteria of sample Miracles built using those rules. Feel free to use them right out of the book or adjust them to suit your taste.

Each power is listed with its total cost per die, including all the Extras, Flaws and Power Quality levels. Double the cost for Hard Dice and quadruple it for Wiggle Dice. Each power also has an "Effect" section that summarizes how all the Power Qualities, Extras and Flaws work.

Aces (12)

Qualities: A D U

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Augment +4, Willpower

Cost -2. Capacities: Self

Defends Extras and Flaws: Augment +4, Willpower

Cost -2. Capacities: Self

Useful Extras and Flaws: Augment +4, Willpower

Cost -2. Capacities: Self

Effect: You're lucky. Insanely, impossibly, miraculously lucky. In the resolution phase you can add

Aces dice to another action at a cost of 1 Willpower per Aces die, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die. (See page 123 for the limitations of Augment.)

Alternate Forms (18)

Qualities: A D U

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for shapechanging) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. Capacities: Self.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for shapechanging) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. Capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for shapechanging) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. Capacities: Self.

Effect: You can change your shape. Using the Variable Effect Extra you can gain new powers to go



along with it: Just “transfer” each die of Alternate Forms to a separate power for the duration, and spend Willpower to gain new Extras and Power Quality Levels, such as increased damage or protection.

You retain your own Stats and Skills when you change forms, but you can use the Alternate Forms dice to increase them.

If you want to change your Stats and Skills when you change forms, take a separate Useful quality. Roll to activate it and you can rearrange your Stat and Skill dice however you like, then use Alternate Forms’ Variable Effect qualities to add power dice. You might want to add If/Then to the Variable Effect qualities to specify that you can use them only when you initiate your transformation by rolling to activate that “change Stats” quality. (That will actually reduce the cost of the overall power, but the downside is that you need to roll to activate it in the first place instead of just rearranging your dice with Variable Effect.)

If you want additional Stats, Skills or powers that work only in a particular alternate form, buy them normally and use the Attached Flaw to link them to Alternate Forms. This is a great way to set up a character who is a normal human being but who can transform into a powered alternate form.

If you want some of your normal Stats, Skills and powers to NOT work when you’re in an alternate form, take the If/Then Flaw on each of them. (Players and GMs alike, be careful here. Taking If/Then on a whole host of powers just because they don’t work when you’re using a single power that you never actually use might be fishy. Remember, if a Flaw is not a significant drawback, it’s worth no Points.)

What if your character’s normal body remains unharmed no matter how much punishment an alternate form takes? That’s pretty handy, so take that as another Useful quality (page 106) without Variable Effect. Roll to activate that Useful quality

and you turn back to human, unharmed. (But that particular alternate form remains hurt until you stay in it long enough for it to heal.)

You can reduce the cost of Alternate Forms by applying Flaws to its Power Qualities that limit the kinds of powers you can gain or, by restricting the Useful quality, the kinds of shapes you can take. The exact value of the Flaw is up to you, the GM and the other players, but generally a –1 Flaw should be somewhat restricting (a family of related shapes), while a –2 Flaw could restrict you to a single shape.

Bind (4)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Power Capacity (Mass) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Effect: Your power immobilizes a target at a distance. A bound target cannot take any actions. The Power Capacity (Mass) Extra allows you to hold fast an inanimate mass at range. To hold another character your Bind roll must succeed in a contest with the target’s Brawling Skill roll or whatever other dice pool the GM thinks could resist your power. A bound target can attempt to escape once per round.

You can decide the exact form that your power takes—powerful webbing, a force field, a cocoon of iron, whatever—when your character gains the power. To change its form take the Variable Effect Extra on Useful.

Block (2)

Qualities: D.

Defends capacities: Self.

Effect: You can use Block as a defense roll, just like dodging or blocking. To gain more “gobble” dice, increase its Defends quality.

Containment (14)

Qualities: D U.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Controlled Effect +1, Radius +2, Power Capacity (Range) +2. *Capacity:* Range.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Controlled Effect +1, Power Capacity (Range) +2, Radius +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Effect: You can create a force field or other effect that contains masses at a distance. It holds things in place up to its mass capacity; to break free, any character within its radius must beat its roll with a Brawling roll or whatever other action the GM things could overcome your power. With the Controlled Effect Extra, you can specify which characters in the radius are affected, or set it up as a screen that keeps things outside it at bay but leaves things inside it free to move around.

Control (Type) (6)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks capacities: Mass or range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Mass or range.

Effect: You have superhuman control over some energy or substance. If you control a form of substance, your power has a mass capacity; if you control energy, you can control any amount of that energy within the power's range. To have both range and mass capacities—to manipulate solid matter at a distance—take the Extra Power Capacity (Range) or (Mass).

By default, the cost of Control does not depend on the type of energy or substance, or how rare or common it is. If you choose a very specific, hard-to-find substance or energy, you might take If/Then or an equivalent Flaw to reflect its low utility. For an exceptionally broad power to control things, take the Variable Effect Extra.

By manipulating the substance or energy you can use it to attack, to block attacks, and to form

intricate useful shapes or perform tasks. The controlled substance or energy reverts to normal when your Control action ends.

Control does not allow you to create the substance or energy out of thin air. That requires a separate Miracle (for an example see Create, page 143) or another Useful quality (page 106).

Cosmic Power (21)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must be used for Variable Effect) –1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must be used for Variable Effect) –1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must be used for Variable Effect) –1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Effect: With a successful roll you can temporarily manifest any new Miracle that you wish. Cosmic Power by itself does nothing, but it can emulate any power. Use the Variable Effect Extra to “transfer” each die of Cosmic Power to a separate power for the duration, and spend Willpower to gain new Extras and Power Quality Levels, such as increased damage or protection.

Example: Cosmic Power

Ariel “Queen Voodoo” Mackenzie has 5d+2wd in a Miracle called Loa Power (A D U) with the standard Cosmic Power Extras and Flaws. This Miracle costs 21 Points per die, or 273 Points.

Queen Voodoo uses the Variable Effect Extra on her power's Useful quality to emulate a power she calls Spy On Distant Enemy. She uses 3d+1wd of her Loa Power Miracle to emulate Spy On Distant Enemy, leaving 2d+1wd that she could use to emulate some other power or use with Loa Power itself.

Queen Voodoo takes three levels of Booster on Spy On Distant Enemy's range capacity, for +3 Points per die, to give it a range of about 50 miles (80 km.). For 2d+1wd, that costs 18 Willpower with a successful roll to activate Loa Power.

Create (Type) (6)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks capacities: Mass or range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Mass or range.

Effect: You can create some energy or substance out of thin air. You must define a specific type of substance or energy and stick with it; to be able to change it, add the Variable Effect Extra to the Useful quality. As written, Create assumes you can use the substance or energy to destroy things or to avoid harm, blasting away with fire, deflecting attacks with a sudden hailstorm or whatever your specifically power does.

This power does not give you supernatural control over the thing that you've created; that requires a separate Miracle (for an example see Control, page 142) or a separate Useful quality (page 106). Nor does it give you immunity to your creation—at least, not without yet another Useful quality or a Miracle such as Immunity (page 148)—so be careful where you stand when you use your power.

Custom Hit Locations (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Always On -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: When you activate this power you can rearrange your hit locations and their 34 wound boxes in any manner you like. You must still spread them among 10 hit location numbers, but you can choose how many or how few locations you have; if you want all 10 hit location numbers in one 34-box hit location, you can. You can't have more than 10 hit location



numbers, however, and therefore you can't have more than 10 hit locations.

You must designate one of your hit locations as your "core" location. If its wound boxes are all filled with Shock or Killing damage, the effect is the same as when a human torso's wound boxes are filled with damage.

You must also designate four of your wound boxes as brain boxes. When those particular four boxes are all filled with Shock damage, you're knocked unconscious. If they are all filled with Killing, you die. A strangling attack (page 70) can target any hit location that has a brain box. It's a good idea to highlight those brain boxes on the hit location chart so you remember exactly where they are.

If your brain boxes are in a hit location that also has normal wound boxes, they always suffer damage last when that hit location is struck. Shock damage in the non-brain boxes turns to Killing damage before new damage spills over into the brain boxes.

Damage to your wound boxes recovers normally. If and when you change back to a normal human form, you can distribute injured wound boxes however you like, except for damage to "core" or "brain" wound boxes. Damage to "core" boxes goes to your human torso, and damage to "brain" boxes goes to your human head.

This power gives you one particular set of custom hit locations; define them when you take this power. To be able to change them around, use the Variable Effect Extra.

~~Dead Ringer (7)~~

Qualities: U

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for choosing different appearances) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A

Effect: You can change your appearance to impersonate anyone or anything of about the same size. To change your size significantly requires its own Miracle, such as Size Shift (page 155), or another Useful quality.

Duplicates (12)

Qualities: D U U.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Attached ("helpers" quality) -2, Interference +3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (helpers) Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Obvious -1, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (the real me) Extras and Flaws: Attached ("helpers" quality) -2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: With a roll of the "helpers" quality you can create width in physical duplicates who can help you accomplish any action. Add one bonus die per duplicate to each dice pool for the power's duration as your twins cooperate with you on each task. (This is equivalent to characters cooperating with each other on difficult tasks; see page 29.)

The "real me" Power Quality makes it difficult for others to determine which is your original character—they need a Scrutiny roll in a contest with your Duplicates activation roll to tell you from your duplicates.

Duplicates' Defends quality represents the fact that enemies have many potential targets and no way to tell which is really you. It automatically rolls your Duplicates dice pool as a defense roll (with the Interference Extra!) whenever you are attacked. An attack that it spoils hits one of your doubles rather than harming you.

Elasticity (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can stretch your body out to the range of your power and squeeze it through tight spaces. Use your Body and Coordination Stats and Skills as usual to do things; the power simply allows you to stretch and use them at a distance. As with other powers, Elasticity requires its own dice pool to activate it under difficult circumstances such as combat; if you want to stretch and make a Body or Coordination roll in the same round, you need multiple actions unless the GM says Elasticity doesn't require a roll.

Extra Tough (5)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: When you activate this power, it gives you width in additional wound boxes on every hit location. Extra Tough is typically bought with Hard Dice to guarantee its width.

The Extra Tough miracle's wound boxes work like any other wound boxes on your character: If they get hurt, they stay hurt until they have time to heal. If your power has a short duration, the wound boxes go away when the power expires—but when you turn the power on again the number of boxes that were hurt before are hurt now. You don't get fresh, unhurt wound boxes just by deactivating the power and then turning it back on.

Flight (4)

Qualities: D U.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Speed.

Effect: You can fly! See page 111 to determine your base speed.

Gadgeteering (16)

Qualities: A D U U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Delayed Effect -1, Endless +3, If/Then (Variable Effect requires a workshop and time to work) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for weird technology) -1, Variable Effect +4, Willpower Investment -1. *Capacities:* N/A.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Delayed Effect -1, Endless +3, If/Then (Variable Effect requires a workshop and time to work) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for weird technology) -1, Variable Effect +4, Willpower Investment -1. *Capacities:* N/A.

Useful (gadget creation) Extras and Flaws: Delayed Effect -1, Endless +3, If/Then (Variable Effect requires a workshop and time to work) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for weird technology) -1, Variable Effect +4, Willpower Investment -1. *Capacities:* N/A.

Useful (gadget disassembly) Extras and Flaws: Delayed Effect -1, Endless +3, If/Then (requires a workshop and time to work) -1, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You can create gadgets with amazing powers. With a successful Gadgeteering roll you can use the Variable Effect Extra to “transfer” Gadgeteering dice into a new power.

The “weird technology” theme for Variable Effect requires all the new powers to be built in foci. If a focus is destroyed, you get the transferred dice back but lose one point of Willpower per “transferred” die, two Willpower per Hard Die, and four Willpower per Wiggle Die. If you deliberately disassemble the focus yourself, you get all the invested Willpower back.

Gadgeteering's “Modifications” effect allows you to manipulate power foci belonging to others. You can disassemble or modify another character's focus with a Gadgeteering roll against the largest dice pool in that focus. However, you can't



disassemble or modify a focus with the Immutable Flaw, and you can't disassemble a focus that has the Indestructible Extra.

When you disassemble a focus you take it apart to see what makes it tick. You gain 1 Willpower per die, 2 Willpower per Hard Die, and 4 Willpower per Wiggle Die of all powers contained in the focus, and the focus loses all its powers.

To modify someone else's focus, you can "transfer" some of your Gadgeteering dice to a power within it, either to augment a current power or to add an entirely new power.

If you want to create a gadget that sticks around permanently—separately from your Gadgeteering dice pool, so you can free up those dice for other gadgets—you can do so by spending Willpower equal to the total Point cost of the power, including all Extras and Flaws, and then spending a point of Base Will. This works just like picking up a new power (page 58); the Gadgeteering power lets you do this any time you want, even without the Mutable Archetype quality, as long as you're building a gadget.

A version of Gadgeteering that allows you to create and modify magical artifacts might be called Enchantment or Alchemy. It would work the same way, but you can't create or modify technological gadgets, only enchanted things.

Ghost (6)

Qualities: D U.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effects: You can manifest a semi-substantial clone of yourself into which you can place your consciousness. While you wander in the ghost your body remains behind, unconscious. This "ghost" cannot interact with the physical world but can observe and can pass through solid objects and barriers.

Any successful attack dissipates your "ghost"—it has no wound boxes and no armor—and returns you to your own body. However, Ghost's Defends quality allows you to make defense rolls to avoid harm.

To allow it to stand up to punishment give it the Armored Defense Flaw on Defends or wound

boxes with the Extra Tough Miracle and the Flaw Attached to Ghost.

To be able to interact with the physical world add the Attacks quality and the Power Capacity (Mass) Extra.

Harm (2)

Qualities: A.

Attacks capacities: Mass or range.

Effect: You can hurt things. Make an attack roll to inflict width in Shock and Killing damage. With the range capacity, you can attack at a distance. With mass, your Harm attack does knockback. To increase Harm's damage, increase its Attacks quality.

Healing (1)

Qualities: U+1.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch.

Effect: You can heal injured living tissue. With a Healing roll you cause a living target to instantly heal width in Shock and Killing damage from a single hit location of your choice. To be able to heal diseases or toxins that don't inflict physical damage, take a separate Useful quality.

Heavy Armor (6)

Qualities: D.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Endless +3, Interference +3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Each die in your Heavy Armor set removes one die of equal or lesser height from every attack that hits you. To emulate a true Heavy Armor Rating (page 65), take Hard Dice in Heavy Armor for a guaranteed height of 10. Any attack with width lower than your Heavy Armor roll automatically bounces right off.

Thanks to the Armored Defense Flaw, an attack with the Penetration quality (or a Miracle with the Penetration Extra) reduces your Heavy Armor by one point of Penetration.

Chapter 4: Combat describes the various levels of Heavy Armor. Of course, you also need to decide whether Heavy Armor by itself is enough protection. Heavy Armor works like a really thick eggshell: If an attack has enough Penetration to crack your armor, you'll take ALL the damage. For a *really* resilient character, you might want to take some Light Armor (maybe even with Hardened Defense) or some Extra Tough to stand up to damage that does get past your Heavy Armor.

Illusions (6)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks capacities: Range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can create an illusion that makes a target see, hear, feel or smell anything you want. To convince a target that the illusion is real, roll against the target's Scrutiny Skill roll.

With the Attacks quality you can trick the target's body into reacting as if he or she has been

A Heavy Armor Variant: Medium Armor

Medium Armor is a Flaw on Heavy Armor's "Defends" Power Quality worth -1 point per die.

Rather than reducing the width of the actual attack roll, each rank of Medium Armor blocks 1 Shock and 1 Killing from the attack. Where one level of Heavy Armor is enough to completely block any attack with width 2, one level of Medium Armor would simply reduce the damage.

Each level of Penetration in an attack reduces Medium Armor by one point. Unlike Light Armor, which always leaves at least one point of Shock damage, Medium Armor can reduce an attack's damage to zero.

injured, inflicting width in (genuine) Shock and Killing damage. With Defends you can use illusions to distract an attacker.

To affect more than one target, use multiple actions or take the Radius Extra.

If your power is instead a psychic hallucination that only affects characters who have Base Will (that is, it doesn't affect robots and security cameras; see page 100), take the No Physical Change Flaw for -1 on Attacks, Defends and Useful.

Immunity (Type) (3)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You are immune to some unusual and otherwise dangerous substance or environment, such as radiation, viruses, suffocation, or something else. Consult with the GM and other players to decide what's an appropriate scope for the power.

Immunity does not protect you against ordinary attacks—at least, not without the Defends quality—but it protects you completely against Non-Physical (page 127) attacks that are based on the subject of your immunity. Immunity is usually taken with multiple Hard Dice to guarantee its effect at height 10.

For broad immunity you can add the Variable Effect Extra. With Immunity that has an ongoing effect due to Permanent, Endless or Duration, Variable Effect allows the power to adjust automatically to other sources of harm.

A Harm Example: The Odd Squad's Chicago Heat Ray

The alien IAM and the giant robot SAM worked together using their Gadgeteering powers to create a devastating heat ray, a jumble of alien biological power nodes in a battered steel gun structure scavenged from a scrapyard. By coincidence, they had it ready just in time to take on the Army's Talent Team One at the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention.

Creating the Heat Ray with Gadgeteering cost IAM 24 Willpower for its assorted qualities, Extras and Flaws. (As a robot SAM has no Willpower, so IAM had to spend the Willpower for them both.)

If the Heat Ray were taken as a permanent power, it would cost 32 Points.

Heat Ray 4d (A+3; 8 per die; 32 pts; costs 24 Willpower with Gadgeteering)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Burn +2, Depleted -1, Focus (Accessible) -2, Penetration +4.

Capacities: Range.

Effect: Heat Ray inflicts width + 3 in Shock and Killing damage with Penetration 4 and 16 charges.

Summed up in ordinary weapon terms, their invention looks like this:

Heat Ray (no Skill; 4d attack)

Damage width + 3 in Shock and Killing, Burn, Penetration 4; Ammo 16, Range 40 yards, Wound Boxes 4.

Insubstantiality (6)

Qualities: A D U +1.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Non-Physical +2, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch.

Effect: You can become completely immaterial, able to pass through solid objects like a ghost.

With Attacks you can “phase” into the same space as a target. As your bodies automatically separate the trauma causes width in Shock and Killing damage. (Presumably your power prevents you from taking the same damage; you can take Flaws to make it otherwise.) The Non-Physical Extra ignores armor and ordinary defenses; you should decide what kind of power or effect does block damage from your Insubstantiality attack. For example, maybe the Hardened Defense Extra makes armor too dense for your attack to work.

With Defends you can go insubstantial to avoid attacks; once the power is activated, physical attacks can't hurt you and you can't hurt physical targets without becoming substantial again.

While insubstantial you can speak, hear and see normally. If you want Insubstantiality to restrict your senses and speech, take a Flaw called “Out of Phase” for -1 for restricted speech and hearing, or -2 for restricted speech, hearing and sight (light passes right through your eyes!). You could also take a Flaw called “No Breath” for -1 that requires you to hold your breath while insubstantial.

Invisibility (5)

Qualities: D U.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You can turn invisible. Ordinary sight just can't see you. Anyone attempting to detect you with



some means other than plain sight—making a Scrutiny or Perception roll to see your tracks or to smell your cologne, for instance—must make an opposed roll against your Invisibility dice pool. Being invisible you are rather hard to target, which is why your power reflexively defends you against all attacks once you activate it.

To make yourself invisible to some other sense besides sight, change this Miracle's name to Inaudible or Unsmellable or whatever and remove the Defends quality (since being hard to smell doesn't often make you any harder to hit).

Invulnerability (20)

Qualities: D D U.

Defends (HAR) Extras and Flaws: Interference +3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Defends (LAR) Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Hardened Defense +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Permanent +4, Self Only -3, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for immunities) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You are (mostly) impossible to harm. Invulnerability's Useful quality protects you against some otherwise-deadly environment—radiation, vacuum, bitter cold, or something else—without harm. With Variable Effect and Permanent, it instantly adjusts to fit any dangerous environment.

In combat, each die of your Invulnerability roll removes one die from each attack against you. If an attack's width is great enough to hit despite your power's Interference dice, you have width in Hardened LAR against its damage.

Invulnerability is usually taken with multiple Hard Dice to guarantee a static defense set at height 10.

Foolish Mortals!

I can see you doing the math already: "I can spend a mere 400 Points for 10hd with Invulnerability and NOTHING will ever harm me! I have defeated *Wild Talents!*"

Guess what? You're right. If you want to never, ever take a single point of damage, 10hd of Invulnerability is the way to go.

The problem with that is, people are adaptable. Once they figure out they can't take you out by dropping a nuke on your head, they'll find other ways to mess with you.

First and foremost, they'll go after your Willpower. Remember your motivations? An enemy only needs to hit you in a loyalty or a passion a few times to drop your Willpower to zero, and then your powers all drop in effectiveness (see page 53).

And if that doesn't work, they might just move you out of the way. A few levels of Booster on Teleportation can drop you in, say, the black hole at the center of the Milky Way. It won't kill you, but it might keep you occupied for a while.

And if you want to be the guy who can teleport anybody he wants into the black hole at the center of the Milky Way, you can do that, too.

The point is, *Wild Talents* is built to let you do what you want. If you want to be invincible, go for it. But remember, the GM is going to be there to make things interesting anyway.

Jinx (8)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Interference +3, If/Then (must use Interference) -1, Willpower Cost -2.

Capacities: Range.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Interference +3, If/Then (must use Interference) -1, Range Capacity +2, Willpower Cost -2. *Capacities:* Range.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Interference +3, If/Then (must use Interference) -1, Willpower Cost -2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: You're bad luck, at least for people you don't like. Each die in your Jinx set removes one die of equal or lower height from the target's roll. However, it costs you 1 Willpower per Jinx die thrown, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die.

Light Armor (3)

Qualities: D.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Endless +3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You gain width in LAR. You can increase the LAR by taking additional Defends Power Quality Levels.

To be able to turn on your armor every time, without fail, always with the same effect, take two or more Hard Dice in Light Armor. For armor that you don't even need to activate, take Hard Dice and change Endless to the Permanent Extra.

For attacks that pierce armor easily due to the Penetration Extra, you may need to add the Hardened Defense Extra (page 126).

Mind Control (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can control the target's behavior for the power's duration (that's one round unless you take the Duration or Endless Extra). The target can oppose your power's roll with a Stability Skill roll. After the first round, the target can get another

Every Kind of Defense

In the Miracle Cafeteria we have a lot of different defensive powers. Here are some ideas on how to use the most common ones.

Heavy Armor: Heavy Armor acts as a wall, in many cases giving an all-or-nothing defense. If your attack lacks the Penetration to break through the armor, it simply bounces off harmlessly unless you get a really lucky (wide) roll. If you don't take the "Armored Defense" Flaw, it's not subject to Penetration at all and only a really lucky shot will get through—but if it does get through, it's likely to hurt or kill.

Light Armor: Light Armor doesn't block damage entirely but makes it less dangerous by converting Killing to Shock. Light Armor with the "Hardened Defense" Extra is a good way to model the resilience of superhumanly tough characters, where a bullet is likely to bruise but not kill even if it gets past any Heavy Armor you might have.

Extra Tough: You get extra wound boxes. This doesn't make you any harder to hurt, and you don't recover any faster, but you can stand up to more punishment than a human body could endure.

Example—The Living Tank: Let's say you're playing a self-aware, sentient tank, with treads and armor and an engine and everything. Take Extra Tough to represent the fact that it can absorb a lot more punishment than a human body—it has more wound boxes on each hit location. Take Light Armor with the "Hardened Defense" Extra to give it a reinforced superstructure that will take only easily-repaired Shock damage from most attacks. And take Heavy Armor to give it a steel hull that deflects most attacks outright.

attempt to throw off your power with a Stability roll by spending a point of Willpower or Base Will.

Note that this power does not allow you to read minds, only control them, and you must speak to the target and be understood. To read the target's mind or send signals telepathically, buy a separate power or add another Useful quality to this power.

Minions (4)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: You summon a group of minions (see page 77) to do your bidding. The height of your roll determines their quality rating: At height 1–3 they're rabble, at height 4–6 they're trained, at height 7–8 they're professional, and at height 9–10 they're expert. The minions have no armor or weapons.

You summon a number of minions equal to the size of your dice pool. The types of dice don't matter, only the number; with 10d, 10hd or 10wd you summon 10 minions. After you summon the minions, they act each turn separately from you for the duration of your power using the standard minion rules. To miraculously create a private standing army, replace the Duration Extra with Permanent and use the power as many times as you need.

Whatever form they take—scaly demons or human beings teleported into place from elsewhere—summoned minions speak some language that you speak, but they are not mindless slaves; they are their own characters. If you have this power, presumably you've worked out some kind of deal ahead of time with the minions so they'll follow your orders and fight on your behalf. If not, they won't fight on your behalf without motivation, which makes them very difficult to use if you summon them the first time in the middle of combat. A power like Mind Control might be handy, or a separate Useful quality that's Attached to the main "minions" quality.

If you want minions with strange powers, take the powers as separate Power Qualities or separate powers entirely and link them to Minions with the Attached Flaw. Those are powers that only the minions can use.

Multiple Actions (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful (more actions) Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Self Only –3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (noncombat) Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Self Only –3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: You can move so fast that all actions, even multiple actions, are easy. When you activate your Multiple Actions power, it gives you its width in bonus dice which you can use on any action. The bonus dice are available for the power's duration, but once you use them you must activate the power again to gain more.

If you don't actually declare multiple actions in a roll, you still get the bonus dice; being so fast makes it that much easier when you concentrate on a single task.

Outside combat, your power reduces any action's time increment (see page 23) by its width in steps. If an action normally takes hours, with Multiple Actions width 2 it takes minutes; if it normally takes minutes, with a successful Multiple Actions roll it takes a single round.

(This power took a different shape in *Godlike* and the first edition of *Wild Talents*. You're welcome to use whichever version suits you. The *Godlike* version simply allows you to make width in declarations, rolls, and resolutions each combat round rather than the one cycle that each character normally gets. This gives you a lot of flexibility but can seriously slow the game. The earlier *Wild Talents* version adds your power's width to the width of one set, which you must then split up for multiple actions.)

Nullify (Type) (4)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: This ranged power disrupts one particular Archetype Source on a targeted character. The target loses all powers that come from that Source and its Permissions. The target can attempt to avoid Nullify with a defense roll as if you were attacking.

To restrict Nullify to a single power within a particular Source, take the If/Then Flaw. To allow Nullify to apply to a range of Sources, take the Variable Effect Extra.

Because nullification is such a sweeping, restrictive action, it automatically incurs a Willpower cost (see page 115): You must spend 1 Willpower per die, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die that you roll. When the nullification fades and the target's powers return, you get the Willpower back.

If your game does not use Archetype Sources, Nullification simply removes all a target's Hyperstats, Hyperskills and Miracles.

Perceive (Type) (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can perceive or detect stimuli outside the range of human awareness. You can use Perceive just like making a Sense Skill roll, such as Perception or Scrutiny, but use your Perceive dice pool instead of your Stat and Skill dice.

Perceive, by default, lets you perceive one particular kind of stimulus, whether it's infrared light, X rays, life forms, gravity, magnetism, powers, or whatever. For a particular broad perception—"all spectra of light," say—you may need to add the Variable Effect or another Useful quality. Work with the GM and other players to determine the appropriate scope and cost of your power. For a particular narrow power take the If/Then Flaw.

Power Mimic (15)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must touch subject) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect must match subject's powers) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must touch subject) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect must match subject's powers) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (must touch subject) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect must match subject's powers) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Effect: By touching another character, with a successful roll you can temporarily copy their powers. Use the Variable Effect Extra to "transfer" each die of a Power Mimic quality to a separate power for the duration, and spend Willpower to gain new Extras and Power Quality Levels, such as increased damage or protection. You must mimic the copied powers, however. You can't take Extras or powers that the subject doesn't have, and you must take all Flaws on the copied powers. If you have fewer Power Mimic dice than the subject has dice in powers, you can "copy" power dice up to your Power Mimic limit.

Precognition (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can tell the future. With a successful roll you can get an answer to a single question about the future. The higher you roll, the more precise and detailed your vision. Here are some guidelines for the result of your roll.

Failure: You get a sense of the future that may or may not be accurate.

Success: A brief but accurate vision.

Width 3+: Knowledge of some amount of time (up to the GM) before a certain event occurs.

Height 7+: Knowledge of who exactly is involved in a certain event.

Width 3+ and height 7+: A vision with both timing and subjects clearly shown.

Width 3+ and height 10: An extremely clear vision of the future, as if you had lived the moment already, with all senses represented.

The results of this power are always up to the GM. If you take the Endless or Permanent Extra, the GM may supply you with visions or epiphanies in dreams or meditation, or when you come near some place that may be important in the future.

If you add the Attacks quality, your precognitive power somehow inflicts harm on others. Maybe it allows you to manipulate probabilities so that debris falls on an opponent, or maybe it's simply a magical force that lashes out. The details are up to you.

Because Precognition affects the future—in game terms, you define the future by predicting it—it costs 1 Willpower per die you roll, 2 per Hard Die, and 4 per Wiggle Die.

Psychic Artifacts (18)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Obvious -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for artifacts) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Obvious -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for artifacts) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Obvious -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for artifacts) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Effect: You can create immaterial objects with all kinds of functions. Use the Variable Effect Extra to determine the exact qualities of the object you're creating.

Puppet (4)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: By overcoming another character's Stability roll you can switch minds, taking over the target's body and using all of its senses. The target's mind goes unconscious as long as you're using his or her body, as does your own body. After the first round, the target can make another attempt to roll Stability to throw off your control by spending a point of Willpower or Base Will.

Note that this power does not allow you to read the target's mind; for that ability buy a separate power or add another Useful quality to this power.

Regeneration (5)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: With a successful roll you instantly heal width in Shock and Killing damage from every hit location. Thanks to the Permanent Extra Regeneration rolls automatically each round that you have an injured hit location. If you remove the Self Only Flaw, you could apply your Regeneration power to another person instead of yourself. (See Healing, page 147.) To be able to heal diseases or toxins that don't inflict physical damage, take a separate Useful quality.

Sidekick (6)

Qualities: D U.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effects: You can manifest an entity that acts on its own volition. This sidekick uses your Sense and Mind Stats to perceive the world and think for itself, but it has no Skills. It cannot interact with the physical world but can observe and can pass through solid objects and barriers.

Any successful attack dissipates the sidekick—it has no wound boxes—but its Defends quality allows it to make defense rolls to avoid harm.

To allow it to interact with the physical world add the Attacks quality and the Power Capacity (Mass) Extra; to give it Skills or powers use the Variable Effect Extra to “transfer” dice from Sidekick. To allow it to stand up to punishment give it the Armored Defense Flaw on Defends or wound boxes with the Extra Tough Miracle.

Size Shift (5)

Qualities: D U.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Attached to Useful quality –2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Self Only –3. *Capacities:* Mass.

Effect: You can either increase or decrease your size; choose one. (To do both, take them as separate Useful qualities.) When you activate this power you can double your mass or halve it, and each point of width beyond 2 allows you to double or halve your mass again. You can add the Booster Extra (or No Upward Limit) to Size Shift’s Useful quality to increase or reduce it further.

Size Shift increases or decreases your height as well, but not as dramatically as mass. For each eight times your mass goes up (or down), your height doubles (or halves).

If you’re smaller you’re harder to hit, while if you’re larger you can absorb more punishment. This is reflected in the Permanent Defends quality, which gives you an automatic defense each round. For growth, you may want to take the Armored Defense Flaw so it simply gives you an armor rating.

To have Size Shift affect only mass or height, apply a –1 If/Then Flaw to its Useful quality. If you want to change others’ size, remove the Self Only Flaw. To increase your strength when you grow, take Hyperbody with the Flaw Attached to Size Shift.



Reduced Size

Width	Mass	Height
2	80 lbs (40 kg)	4 ft (1.5 m)
3	40 lbs (20 kg)	3.5 ft (1.25 m)
4	20 lbs (10 kg)	3 ft (1 m)
5	10 lbs (5 kg)	2.5 ft (75 cm)
6	5 lbs (1.5 kg)	2 ft (60 cm)
7	2.5 lbs (750 g)	1.5 ft (50 cm)
8	1 lb (375g)	1 ft (30 cm)
9	8 oz (187 g)	10 in (25 cm)
10	4 oz (90 g)	8 in (20 cm)

And so on. For each 1/8 mass, or each instance of the Booster Extra, halve height.

Increased Size

Width	Mass	Height
2	400 lbs (200 kg)	8 ft (2.5 m)
3	800 lbs (400 kg)	9 ft (3 m)
4	1,600 lbs (800 kg)	12 ft (4 m)
5	1.6 tons	15 ft (5 m)
6	3.2 tons	18 ft (6 m)
7	6.4 tons	25 ft (8 m)
8	12.8 tons	32 ft (10 m)
9	25 tons	40 ft (12 m)
10	50 tons	50 ft (16 m)

And so on. For each x8 mass, or each instance of Booster, double height.

Telekinesis (10)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Power Capacity (Mass) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Power Capacity (Mass) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Effect: You can move objects at a distance. Telekinesis has the range capacity by default; the Power Capacity (Mass) Extra allows it to manipulate mass. With Attacks you can slam targets around for width in Shock and Killing damage; with Defends you can deflect attacks or throw off an enemy's aim.

Telepathy (8)

Qualities: A D U.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Non-Physical +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can read minds. If the target is unaware of your attempt or explicitly unwilling, your Miracle's roll must beat the target's Stability roll in a contest. If you use Telepathy to attack, you inflict terrible pain and psychosomatic spasms for width in Shock and Killing damage. Armor does not block this damage, and it can be avoided only with a Stability Skill roll, not a typical defense or dodge roll. Telepathy's Defends quality allows you to detect hostile intentions early enough to avoid them.

With an additional Useful quality, you can use Telepathy to change or even erase memories indefinitely. This costs Willpower, and your roll must beats the victim's Stability roll. The victim can only gain the lost memories back if another telepath uncovers them, or if some other factor triggers their recovery. If you spend a point of Base Will when you erase the memory, however, the memory will be gone forever.

Teleportation (6)

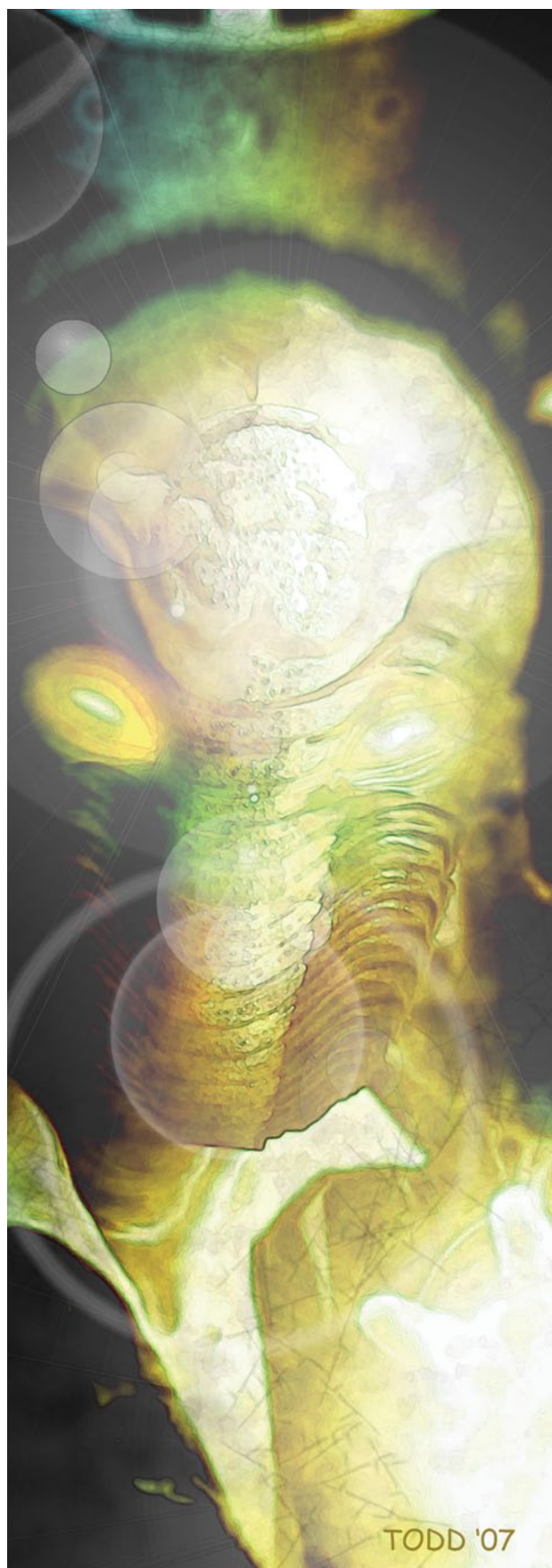
Qualities: A D U.

Attacks capacities: Range.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful capacities: Range.

Effect: You can move instantaneously from one point in space to another, without physically crossing the space in between. The range of your Teleportation power determines how far you can teleport. With the Attacks quality, you can teleport into the same space as a target; as your bodies force each other apart and back to normal, the trauma causes width in Shock and Killing damage. (Presumably your power prevents you from taking the same damage; you can take Flaws to make it oth-



erwise.) With the defends quality, you can “blink” or teleport a few inches out of the way of an attack. To be able to carry additional things with you when you teleport, add the Power Capacity (Mass) Extra.

Time Fugue (11)

Qualities: D U.

Defends capacities: Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Interference +3, Power Capacity (Mass) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, Range.

Effect: You can freeze time for a particular target. Your Time Fugue roll uses Interference to remove dice from the target’s rolls for the power’s duration; if the target has no sets, he or she can take no actions and stands stock still as time seems to pass normally all around.

If you want your power to have a broader effect than just slowing down a single target—it lets you redo the previous round of action, say, or go back in time—take a separate Useful quality with that effect. For Time Fugue to have such drastic effects on the game world it costs Willpower to use: 1 per die, 2 per Hard Die and 4 per Wiggle Die you roll.

Transform (Type) (4)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Mass or range.

Effect: This power comes in two versions; choose one. With the first version, your power transforms some particular substance or type of energy into any other substance or type of energy—you could transform lead to anything you want with Transform Lead, or transform light into anything you want with Transform Light, or transform a human into anything with Transform Human, and so on.

With the second version, your power transforms any substance or energy into some specific thing—you could transform anything to lead with Trans-

form to Lead, or anything to light with Transform to Light, or anything to one or more humans with Transform to Human, and so on.

If your power has the mass capacity, it transforms a solid substance but you must touch the target. If it transforms non-solid energy, it can transform at range.

The transformation lasts for the duration of the current encounter or for a few minutes, according to the Duration Extra. Replace Duration with Endless or Permanent to extend the effects.

To restrict your power—transform lead to gold but to nothing else, for example—take the If/Then Flaw. To broaden it—transform anything to anything—take the Variable Effect Extra.

Unconventional Move (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful capacities: Speed.

Effect: You can move in an unusual way: climb walls, ride a wave of ice, walk on water, whatever you wish. If the movement also allows you to get out of the way of attacks, such as by jumping onto walls or tunnelling instantly away, add the Defends quality. If the power allows you to attack in a special way, such as swinging into an opponent or by undermining an enemy's footing, add Attacks.

Vicious (6)

Qualities: A+1.

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Augment +4, If/Then (must announce in the declare phase) -1. *Capacities:* N/A.

Effect: This power makes any attack more dangerous than usual. Add Vicious' damage bonus from its Attacks Power Quality Levels to any attack action, whether it's another power or some weapon attack. In fact, even if the attack ordinarily would do no damage—using Athletics to bean somebody with a whiffle ball, for example—you can add the Vicious bonus to it if you score a hit. However, you

must roll the smaller of the two dice pools, Vicious or whatever attack it modifies. To apply this to a specific Stat, Skill or power, use the Attached Flaw—or you could simply increase that power's Attacks quality.

Willpower Battery (2)

Qualities: U.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Endless +3, Self Only -3.

Capacities: Self.

Effect: You can set aside a number of Willpower points in a battery—whether it's a physical battery of psychic power or a metaphor for some inner reserves—that are separate from your ordinary Willpower score. You can use this Willpower for any normal purpose, but you cannot lose Willpower from it unless you choose to lose them. With a successful roll you can place width in Willpower in the battery, which can hold a maximum of one Willpower per die. The Willpower points remain in the battery until you use them. If you remove the Endless Extra, the Willpower points return to you automatically at the end of the power's duration.

If your Willpower Battery power is in a focus that can be used by other characters (page 134), others can invest Willpower in it and use its stored Willpower.

10: Choosing Your Powers

You've seen how powers are created in *Wild Talents*, and enough pre-made powers to last any game a long while. Now, what kind do you want?

In this game, you almost certainly play a person with—well, what do you want to call them? “Talents”? “Powers and abilities beyond normal men”? Flat out “Superpowers”?

If you're saying “That's all semantics, it doesn't matter” you might want to think again. *Wild Talents* is essentially a game about power, but power is such a broad topic, and one so compelling to almost everyone, that it deserves a little refinement.

The goal of *Wild Talents* is to be Size 10 fun in a Size 4 swimsuit, but what's the fun you're after? If you know what kind of fun you want out of the game, and you communicate that to your GM and other players, you're a lot more likely to get there than if you wander into the game without a map.

Power Fantasy vs. Alter Ego

Some people play games where their characters can shrug off bullets and punch through a Honda because it's fun to cut loose, kick ass, whomp some bad guys and do a lot of stuff that you, me and your GM will never get to do in real life. This is the power fantasy approach. It lives in the same neighborhood as that daydream of pulling the homecoming queen out of the burning car wreck.

It's fun. But quite often, it's also transitory. A week of waltzing through a squad of podunk bank robbers is good times, but if nothing ever challenges your character, it's going to get boring. You want a cool, competent character and should get one, but there's a difference between being competent and always winning. If you want the game to have long-term legs, be open to being thwarted or outright beaten.

That leads us to the other form of play that often draws folks to superpowered games, which is the alter ego mode. In this, it's less of a daydream and more of an intellectual exercise. What would it really mean to be able to fly? Beyond the social advantages and exhilaration, would it also set you apart from people? What unique problems, responsibilities or challenges go with great power?

Beyond that, what would it really mean to live in a world where there were people who could do that? Depending on the interests of your group, this could get deep into issues of race, class, religion and politics. Or it could just skim along the tops of them.

Whichever interests you—developing a complex and quirky character, or just whaling on evildoers with a fire hydrant—understand that other players may want the other. Also understand that you don't have to be tied down to one approach or the other. If you're open to gaming from both sides, you can have a fun and interesting reaction either way. If you win a fight, you get the obvious and immediate gratification of winning a fight. But if you lose, instead of sulking and looking on it as if you, the player failed, you can look at it as an opportunity to figure out how your character copes with setbacks, adversity and loss.

After all, we shouldn't idolize people who waltz over every problem with ease. There's also a lot to be admired in the guy who doesn't quit and keeps the faith.

The Minmaxing

Okay, I'm just going to come out and say it: This game can be minmaxed. And yes, every game can be minmaxed by someone who's going to bend over backwards to misinterpret rules and try to get

something for nothing. But *Wild Talents'* power system, with its Flaws and Extras and price breaks and added capacities, is particularly friendly to people who want to set up powers with quirky circumstances and ramifications that unfold in nifty ways.

A lot of gamers say “minmax” like it’s a dirty word, but I’m going to break with tradition and suggest that it’s actually fine—to a point. You want a vessel for your power fantasies, and that’s good. It’s good to be involved in the game and it’s good to be interested in the funky scalable mechanics and how the system reacts when you turn this knob and hit that button.

What’s not good is to selfishly let your pleasure in character optimization colonize the whole game and ghettoize other players who didn’t care to pop the hood and tinker.

I’m now going to dismiss the minmaxers—they can go look at the Flaws list—and address the people who really don’t much care for making the deadliest Alternate Form for the fewest Points. What can you folks do to make sure you don’t build a character who can’t keep up?

Help is here.

Get an Ally

I don’t mean that in-game. I mean one of your fellow players, or the GM. In the last game of *Wild Talents* I ran, I quizzed the players on what powers they wanted for their characters and then I just spent the Points. This had the advantage of having all the characters and opponents built on the same philosophy and with the same approach. Your GM may not want to go that far, but certainly she’s going to want to look at your character before playing anyhow. Asking her to doublecheck your math and being open to suggestions can certainly put you in a better position.

Use a Pre-Package

I’m going to just stat up some less-than-obvious modular powers that you can cut and paste onto a character. They’re not going to make your character invincible by any means, but I’ve tried to optimize their cost/benefit ratio (which is really all that the dreaded ‘minmaxing’ is). See **Powers**, page 104, for details about these powers.

The Dodge-Podge (10 Points): Take 2hd in the Dodge Hyperskill with the Permanent Extra. Nothing too fancy. It just means that you’ll automatically get out of the way of nearly any 2x attack. If you want, ponce this up with Go First, increasing the cost to 12 Points, and even 3x hits can be neutralized, while 4x and 5x hits are cut down to a more manageable size.

It’s the Anger-Realizer Gun! (30 Points): This one’s good against people with crazy high Dodge or Block or other defenses based on damage avoidance. You start with Harm at 2 Points per die. Next, add on levels of the Go First Extra, which cost +1 each. Five levels of Go First is +5 per die, bringing us to a fairly pricey 7 Points per die. Flaw it down by putting it in a Focus (–1 per die) and by doing either Shock only or Killing only with Limited Damage (another –1 per die). (Decide when building your character if he’s a loving, gentle creampuff or a flinty cold-eyed killer.) Buy six dice in it for 30 Points. Now you’ve got a gun (or evil eye monkey paw, or whatever) that can roll an okay-not-bad-not-great pool of limited Harm, but any hit is at least going to be timed as if it’s width 7. Really fast people are going to still get ahead of it, but it has the advantage of a good chance of knocking dice out of normal-speed people’s sets.

Goodnight, Gorilla (16 Points): This attack is designed to be a headache (heh) for brick-style soakers with gobs of Heavy Armor. Start again with Harm for 2 per die. Take the Non-Physical Extra (+2) and 2hd. Now we’re at 16 Points, and you can quit there with a power that switches off the lights

of anyone who doesn't have Extra Tough, no matter how many points of HAR she has. It nicely models some kind of psychic whammy. If you want it really nasty, add on Go First. That not only gives you a chance at a millisecond-one knockout, it protects your roll from getting disrupted by a wider attack. You could Flaw it down to make it even more affordable, now that you're hopefully getting a better sense of how optimization works. One example would be . . .

The Sunday Punch (16 Points): Start with "Goodnight, Gorilla" plus five levels of Go First (+5 per die), and then Flaw it down with Slow (-2 per die) and Exhausted (-3 per die). That's a cheap, specialized manstopper that you can't use too often, but then you don't really want to. It's something you bring out once per fight as a climax.

Yo, Adrian (20 Points): Want to stand up to brawling attacks all day long? Take the Light Armor Miracle (page 151) at 2hd, replace Endless with Permanent, add the Hardened Defense Extra for +2 per die, and add Limited Width for -1 per die. That gives you LAR 1 against every attack, even attacks with Penetration. You can save 4 Points by adding the Focus Flaw and building the LAR into a fancy armored costume. Black is always in style.

Collectivism

In a roleplaying game you play half for yourself and half for the other players; they are your audience and your partners. This can be a particularly useful idea at character generation, and specifically for a game of powers where PCs can have wildly divergent abilities in different areas. For example, if everyone else in the party relies on stealth, discretion and Hypercommand, they're not going to want to spend time with a character who has the Obvious Flaw attached to his bread-and-butter power.

If you stubbornly refuse to give ground and make a character who fits in, your reward is likely to be

either (1) resentful fellow players who changed their concepts and are having less fun because of it or (2) a group that excludes your character for reasons that are perfectly logical in-game.

What I'm saying is, compromise. But it's more than just a grudging sacrifice of your character on the altar of communal fun. Think of it as getting their ideas and cooperation for creating your group. Elevating your perspective to that level has all kinds of bonuses. If you're all building characters concurrently with other characters in mind, you get characters who compliment each other and work together smoothly, instead of grating and jarring and hitching. The less time, energy and attention you have to spend justifying why the uptight, letter-of-the-law supercop is hanging out with the rough and ready vigilante, the more you have to create a great story.

It's not just personality, either. Build your character's powers with an eye to what the others have. It's especially useful for the group to not have one character who sticks out too much defensively, in either direction. That is, you don't want to have three guys with HAR 3 and one guy with either no defensive powers or 10hd of Immunity: Everything. Why is this? Because when defensive capacities are all over the map, it's a real pain for the GM to find someone who can challenge the tough guy without slaughtering the fragile guy. Either one character gets a boring cakewalk or the other gets an insurmountable challenge. Neither one of those options is good story fun.

The ideal is to have different defenses, complementary abilities and a group that's stronger than the sum of its members.

One-Roll Talents

Want to come up with a 250-point character without all the work? We're here for you.

Start with a rating of 1 in each of the six Stats. Now roll 9d. Each set gives you a power from the "Sets" charts, below. Each loose, unmatched die gives a result from the "Events" charts that follow—choose an event at your campaign's Blue level or below.

Each result is cumulative with the results at lower widths: If you roll 3x1, for example, you also get the results for 2x1.

Each of those nine dice is worth 24 points, so that plus the starting Stats gives you 246 points' worth of character. You have 4 points to spend on an Archetype to get the Permissions you need for your powers. If you need more points for the Archetype, shave them off the Stats and Skills that you got from Events.

Unless otherwise noted, all Stats and Skills are Hyperstats and Hyper-skills in the Sets charts, and are native Stats and Skills in the Events charts.

Sets: Powers

x1 Brute Strength

2x1 +4d Body; +2hd Heavy Armor (+24); +2hd Brawl; +2d Endurance; +2d Athletics

3x1 +3hd Body.

4x1 +2hd Extra Tough (+20); +1d Body.

5x1 +2d Regeneration (+10); +2hd Light Armor (+12); +1d each in Block and Endurance.

x2 Flight

2x2 +8d+1wd Flight (+48).

3x2 Flight Booster, +1/die (+12); +2hd Light Armor (+12) ('cause honestly, at around 500 mph, you're going to need to worry about skin abrasion if not an air supply).

4x2 +2hd Immunity (high altitude and suffocation) (+12); +2hd Light Armor (+12).

5x2 Add Power Capacity (Mass) to Flight (+24).

x3 Sneaky

2x3 +10d Invisibility (+50); Intrinsic—add an incapacitating Allergy to some uncommon substance to your Archetype (−2).

3x3 +1wd each in Empathy, Scrutiny, Perceive, Stealth, Dodge and Lie.

4x3 +4d Illusions (+24).

5x3 +4d Illusions (+24).

x4 Telekinesis

2x4 +1d+1wd Telekinesis (+50); Intrinsic—add an incapacitating Allergy to some uncommon substance to your Archetype (−2).

3x4 +1d Telekinesis (+10); add Spray 1 to Telekinesis' Attacks quality (+6); add Booster 1 to Telekinesis' Useful quality (+6); remove the Intrinsic Allergy (+2).

4x4 +2d Telekinesis (+22), +2 Willpower (+2).

5x4 Add Non-Physical to Telekinesis' Attacks quality (+16); add Subtle to one Telekinesis power quality (+8).

x5 Power Blast

2x5 +10d Harm (+20); add the Defends power quality to Harm (+20); add Controlled Effect to Harm (+10); Intrinsic—add an incapacitating Allergy to some uncommon substance to your Archetype (−2).

3x5 Add Spray 2 to Harm (+20); remove the Intrinsic Allergy (+2); +2 Willpower (+2).

4x5 Add Go First 2 to Harm (+20); +1 Willpower (+1); +1 Base Will (+3).

5x5 Add Penetration 2 to Harm (+20); +1 Willpower (+1); +1 Base Will (+3).

x6 Devious Manipulator

2x6 +8d+1wd Command.

3x6 +2d+1wd Charm.

4x6 +6d Puppet (+24).

5x6 +4d+1wd Empathy; +1wd each in Lie, Leadership and Persuasion; +4d Perform.

x7 Oracle

2x7 +6d Telepathy (+48).

3x7 +2d Telepathy (+16); +4d Precognition (+8).

4x7 +4d Perceive with Variable Effect (only for perceptions) (+20); +1d Sense.

5x7 +3d Perceive with Variable Effect (only for perceptions) (+15); +3d Precognition (+6); +1 Base Will.

x8 Master of (fill in the blank)

2x8 +6d Control (_____) with the Power Capacity (Range) Extra on Useful (+48).

3x8 +4d Create (_____) (+24).

4x8 +4d Create (_____) (+24).

5x8 +3d Control (_____) (+24).

x9 Got All the Toys

2x9 *The Awesome Wagon:* This is a vehicle with +10d Sense flawed with Focus and Adaptation (+10) and +5hd Heavy Armor with the same flaws (+30). The crowning touch is +8d Unconventional Move with the Focus flaw (+8). It could be a submarine or pretty much anything.

3x9 *The Minionizer:* Whatever this gadget is, it summons (or produces) a squad of competent, autonomous entities—maybe an alien radio that summons a drop-pod of robots from a cloaked orbital factory, or a mystic gew-gaw that conjures the gnomes of the earth. However it works, it's +10d+2hd in a Focus with the Flaws Immutable and Irreplaceable, but the Extra Indestructible (+24).

4x9 *Polyadaptive Suit:* You put it on and it protects you against hostile environments, but not specific attacks. It won't let you get poisoned, drowned, suffocated or irradiated, but if someone shoots with a concentrated beam of energy you you're out of luck. +2hd Immune with Variable Effects and Focus (+24).

5x9 *Temporal Interference Generator:* You aim this gadget at something and that something suddenly has a lot of trouble moving. This could be due to a "slow time" field or increasing the coefficient of friction between all matter targeted, or it could just be a high-tech net. (Actually, I like the idea of a self-aware net.) It's +8d Bind with the Focus flaw (+24).

x10 Perfection

2x10 +2d to each Stat.

3x10 +1d to each Stat.

4x10 +1d to each Stat.

5x10 +1d to each Stat.

Loose Dice: Events**Blue 1–2**

1. Librarian: +1d each to Mind, Sense and Charm; +3d Research; +1d Scrutiny; +1 Willpower.

2. Pilot: +1d each to Coordination, Sense and Mind; +3d Pilot ____; +1d Navigation, +1 Willpower.

3. Cop: +1d each to Body, Sense and Command; +1d each to Brawl, Dodge, Ranged Weapon (Pistol) and Stability; +1 Willpower.

4. Laborer: +1d each to Body, Coordination and Sense; +2d Endurance; +2d Athletics; +1 Willpower.

5. Crook: +1d each to Coordination, Sense and Body; +1d each to Streetwise, Security Systems, Stealth, Scrutiny; +1 Willpower.

6. Journalist: +1d each to Charm, Sense and Command; +1d each to Empathy, Scrutiny, Research, Interrogation; +1 Willpower.

7. Accountant: +2d Mind, +1d Command; +2d Knowledge (Finance); +1d each to Research and Stability; +1 Willpower.

8. Entertainer: +1d each to Command, Charm and Coordination; +1d Persuasion; +3d Perform; +1 Willpower.

9. Naturalist: +1d each to Sense, Mind and Body; +1d Survival; +1d First Aid, +2d Knowledge (Nature); +1 Willpower.

10. Server: +1d to Coordination, Sense and Charm; +2d Perception; +1d Persuasion; +1d Streetwise; +1 Willpower.

Blue 3–4

1. Orphaned: +1d each to Mind and Command; +2d each to Streetwise, Lie and Stability; +1d Survival.

2. Mysterious Benefactor Sent You to Med School: +1d each to Mind and Command; +4d First Aid; +3d Medicine.

3. Secret Admirer: +1d each to Charm and Command; +3d Persuasion; +2d Empathy; +2d Perform.

4. Living a Lie: +1d each to Charm and Mind; +4d Lie; +3d Stealth.

5. Tormented by Guilt! +1d each

to Charm and Command; +2d each to Brawl, Ranged Weapon and Stability; +1d Melee Weapon.

6. Adopted: +1d to Body and Coordination; +2d Language; +2d Stability, +3d Knowledge (____).

7. Hellraiser: +1d each to Body and Charm; +2d Drive; +1d each to Endurance, Brawl, Lie, Security Systems and Persuasion.

8. Wronged and Thirsty For Revenge! +1d each to Body, Command, Brawling, Ranged Weapon, Streetwise, Lie, Interrogation, Intimidation, Stability.

9. Unjustly Convicted: +1d each to Body and Coordination, +1d each to Athletics, Brawl, Endurance, Stability and Intimidation; +2d Perception.

10. Star-Crossed Love: +1d to Charm and Mind; +2d each to Athletics and Persuasion, +3d Empathy.

Blue 5

1. Semi-Human: +1d+2hd Hypercoordination; +2hd Hyperbody; +2d Scrutiny; Intrinsic: Inhuman (–8).

2. Angel Blessed: +2d Aces (24).

3. International Spy: +2d each to Dodge, Drive, Ranged Weapon (Pistol), Lockpick, Stealth and Scrutiny.

4. Amnesia: +8 Base Will.

5. Evil Twin With Equal or Opposite Superpowers: +4d each to Perception, Persuasion and Block.

6. Alien Origin: +1d to each Stat; Brute/Frail Intrinsic (–8); +1d Language: English.

7. Stranded Time Traveler From the Future: +8d Precognition (aka "vaguely remembered history") (16); +4d Knowledge (Engineering).

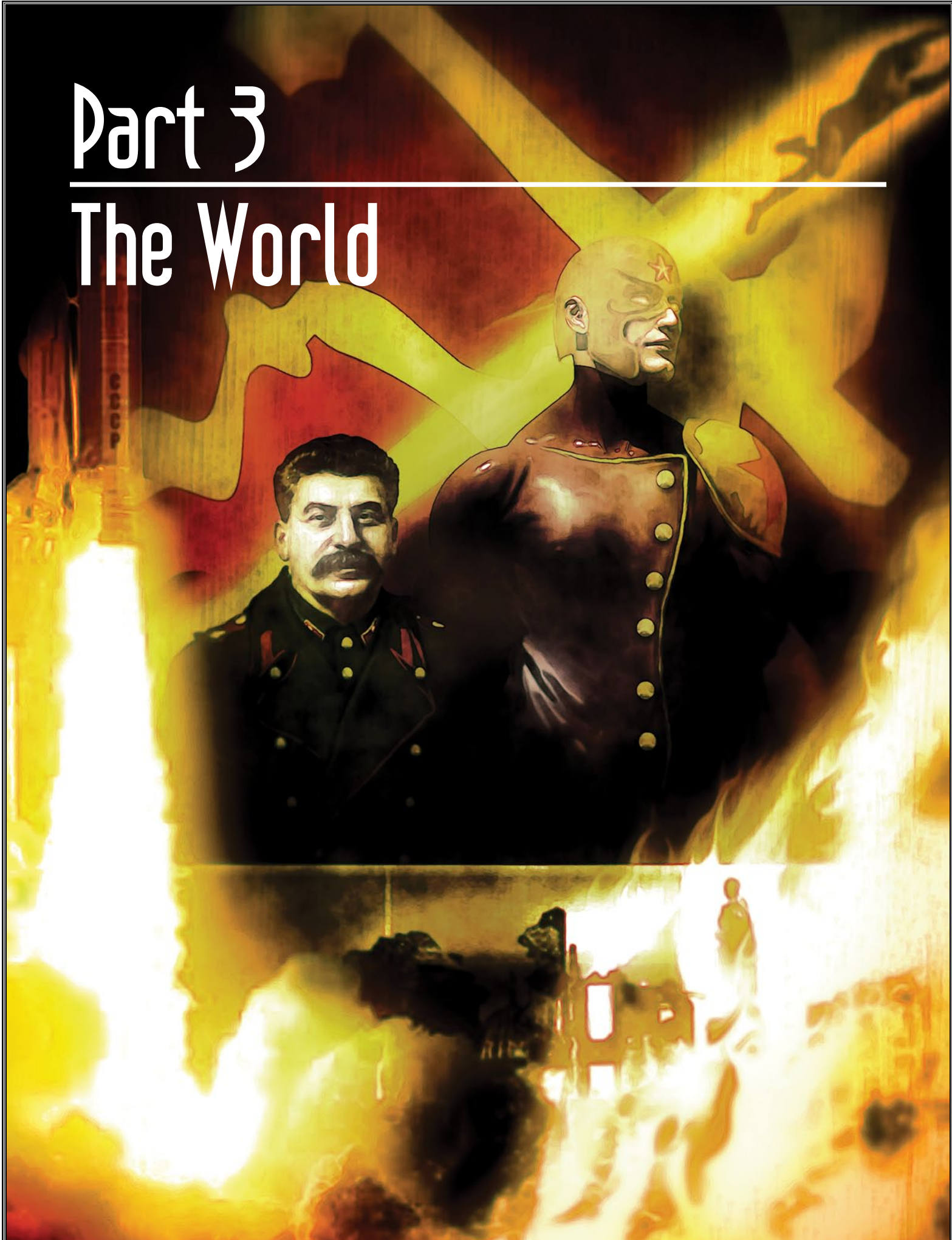
8. Automaton: +2d Hyperstat to each Stat except Charm; the Intrinsic Inhuman and No Base Will (–18); +2d Hyperlanguage: English.

9. Spirit Advisor: +4d Sidekick (24).

10. Supervillain's Offspring: +2d Command; +3d Brawl; +3d Leadership; +1d Knowledge (Death Ray Repair).

Part 3

The World



Chapter 11: Building Superheroic Histories

So far, this book has been all about building characters. Now we'll talk about building worlds.

Every superhero story is an alternate history. Even if everything else is the same, down to the rivets on the newest model Lexus and the faces on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*, there's one big difference: Talents walk the world. If that's all the alternate history you want, and you don't care (and you're sure that nobody will ask) why Gwyneth Paltrow is on magazine covers in a world that has Wonder Woman, and why Lexuses even have rivets if Reed Richards patented the flying car in 1961—well, you're done. Your alternate history is already designed for you, and you can skip the rest of this chapter.

On the other hand, part of the fun of building a superheroic world is, well, building a superheroic world. How do Talents change fashion? Or politics? Or warfare? Or continental drift? Where can history be shouldered aside by Hyperbody, or charmed out of its tracks by Hypercommand? What would a world of Wild Talents look like? What could it look like? What do you want it to look like?

Hyperfoundations

Let's answer that last question first.

There's one very important rule to keep hold of during this process:

First decide what you want, then build it.

Work backward. Begin with response and then dream up the stimulus; start with effect, and use that to deduce cause. That way, you'll be more likely to wind up with something in which you can actually set the game you want to play.

It's possible to just start building and let the setting decide where it wants to go—it's a lot of fun, too, in a kind of wool-gathering way—but you're a lot less likely to end up really invested in the game. Worse yet, you might feel obliged to set your game in this "logical" setting anyway. After all, you designed it using faultless principles of cause and effect, as set out in this oh-so-shiny, full-color rule-book. Except you didn't design it—you let it design itself. (Letting the setting design itself can come in handy—especially when your players start stress-testing the campaign—but that's another topic.) You've already abrogated control over your game, and you haven't even started playing yet.

Work the other way around wherever possible. Decide the kind of superworld you want, and fill it in behind you; sink your foundation deepest where you already know you're going to put up the tallest, most scenic towers in your game world. Write down the answers, then ask what the questions were.

Axes of Design

Before you even start changing history, then, it helps to have some kind of outline of the world you want to wind up with. There's a fair number of questions to think about in this "outline" stage, but let's begin with four basic axes, or continua, of design. These will help set parameters for your world; they can clarify the issues before you decide on something that you won't wind up actually enjoying or using. You can raise or lower any of these parameters independently of each other; raising all four of them together, by happy chance, replicates the traditional "Silver Age" feel of, well, four-color superhero comic books.

Red: Historical Inertia

For the last two centuries at least, historians have argued back and forth between the Great Man version of history and the Great Momentum version. In the Great Man version, individual “heroes on horseback”—Napoleon, Luther, Hitler—forge nations, overturn religions, and start wars. In the Great Momentum theory, events happen because of large-scale social and economic factors beyond the control of any individual. If Napoleon had drowned as a baby, some other general would have created the mass army of columns, exported French revolutions to Germany, and modernized European law codes; these were natural outgrowths of military technology, ideological psychology, and middle-class mass literacy. The sense of an inevitable sweep of history (usually toward some version of progress, often culminating in Our Glorious Selves) is most closely linked with Marxist theories; naturally, a Great Momentum world is high-Red.

So what, I can hear you ask, does this have to do with Talents? Well, Talents are obviously potentially the Greatest Men around. If Great Men actually can change history, you have a potential explanation for any change points you toss into the mix; if they always change history, you potentially have a very fluid game.

On the other hand, if Talents never wind up changing history, you may need to explain how that happens (see **Why You Can't Change History**, page 167). In general, your game world will become more fluid and more grounded in politics at low Redness levels. At higher Redness, your game world may still change, but you (as the GM, and hence as the personification of Vast Unknowable Social Movements and Economic Imperatives) will control its speed and direction. Talents will primarily involve themselves with each other and leave politics and economics to lesser beings.

You can often shift levels; a game may assume “history as normal” up to the game’s present day, at which point the Redness level drops when the player characters start shoving things around. (Shifting from Red 4 to Red 2 or 3 is very easy early on.) Unless you explicitly design your world with an “age of titans” in its past, it’s harder to shift to higher levels of Redness: If the players know that Mega-Man killed Hitler in 1942, they might feel cheated if you don’t let them use their powers to kill Robert Mugabe. You can always explain specific instances away, of course, but remember that the players are using your description of your world’s history and politics partially as a guideline to what you expect from them. Don’t keep the player characters at Red 5 while NPC Talents swan around altering the world at will, unless you plan to irritate them and disrupt your world’s internal consistency.

Here are some benchmarks for various Redness levels in your game world:

Red 1

Talents change the course of history all the time, and may the better (or bigger) Talent win. The ancient gods and heroes were all Talents, perhaps. A Talent helped Cornwallis defeat the rebels in 1778, and a squadron of Talents helped colonize Mars in 1950. Everything ever invented, marketed, or perfected was a Hyperbrain innovation. Talents constantly take the forefront of history; only very rare and (dare I say it) talented normal people can make any kind of difference. If you’re trying to create an extremely alternate—even unrecognizable—history, this is a good level of Redness to begin with. Alan Moore’s *Miracleman* posits that even one Talent—if he’s powerful enough—can, and likely will, alter the world irrevocably.

Why You Can't Change History: Explaining Redness

It's historically inevitable that a few reasons for high-Red worlds to stay that way would emerge. Mix and match as you like; they're mostly consistent, or at least explicably interrelated, with each other. Historians have multiple explanations for historical phenomena—why shouldn't you have multiple explanations for Talents and history itself?

Other Talents Will Stop You: This can be policy on the part of some over-group of Talents (or a single Watcher or Guardian) who feel that meddling is wrong, or just the cussed way these things always work. ("How did Captain Llama know that I planned to destroy all the world's alpaca?")

It might also be the natural result of attempted changes in the past: in a world with Talents, some pretty powerful ones will be preventing the President's assassination or mind-control; competing Hyperbrains will sabotage your cold-fusion patent to keep their own refinery business booming.

This makes superficial sense, at least—even a superman can't kill Hitler if the Nazis have a matching übermensch of their own.

The Spirit Is Willing, But The Talent Is Weak: Some campaigns introduce rules like Will Ceilings, point limits, power nullification, or Will-cancellation that simply organically prevent major changes from happening, since no Talent can actually change history any more than one battleship can change it. Sure, you're as powerful as a panzer—Hitler's got ten thousand of them at Kursk.

Moral Suasion: All Talents (or at least all the heroic ones) follow the example of the first and best of their kind, or of Mahatma Gandhi (who, by night, fought British imperialism as Ahimsa-Man!),

or they understand that with great power comes great responsibility. Perhaps Hyperbrains know that the effects of uncontrolled Innovation could damage society, and discourage it through brilliant memetic propaganda.

Fear: As Voltaire said, "conscience is not the voice of God but the fear of the police." In games where Talents are hunted by the authorities, rigorously controlled and policed, generally mistrusted, or secretly hiding out for whatever reason, changing history is like painting a big old target on yourself. Whole swarms of cops and soldiers, and a few trusted Talents, come down on you like a ton of bricks if you try anything. Nobody likes to be hated and ostracized, even supervillains; social controls keep society stable.

Gosh, I Don't Know: This approach makes the explanation a challenge for the players to uncover. Perhaps a secret society of Talents keeps things on course, or the Primordial Forces of Order are winning a cosmic struggle. Maybe the gods of Olympus and Asgard formed a magical pact back in 476 A.D. after their fighting accidentally caused the Dark Ages, and they agreed never to let that kind of thing get out of hand again.

Everybody Knows It Doesn't Work: Hyperbrains figured out long ago that human history is, in fact, an inevitable progression of hyper-complex variables that makes conventional chaos theory look like second-grade arithmetic. Trying to change things on a large scale always causes disasters, and never in a good way. So people don't bother trying now. It's like how everybody, even if they're not physicists, knows you can't build a perpetual motion machine. Sure, a few cranks try it—but they never succeed, so it must be impossible. Right?

Red 2

At this Red level Talents, like any other great figures of history, have the potential to change things, but they must seize the proper moment. With Hyperbrains that's not as hard, of course; and Hypercommand can create the proper moment in many cases. Several countries, and perhaps entire economic systems, have been notably altered by Talents in the recent past. Talents can't necessarily stop a war once it starts, but they can prevent one if given a head start, and Talents usually decide the outcome. Worlds with a high "science fiction" feel to them will often have this level of Redness, as manufacturable Talent foci mesh to alter the fabric of society.

Red 3

Changing history is hard, even for a Talent. Especially for a Talent, since so many people (including other Talents) are watching them—but it's not impossible. Manufacturable foci are rare, but they exist, especially in military hardware or "off panel" industrial work. Cultural and political inertia are high, but not insuperable; changing the world is an excellent through-line for a whole campaign. The

rewards of changing history can be all the sweeter for the effort—or the Talents can fail at their goals while still altering history forever.

Warren Ellis' run on *Stormwatch* and *The Authority* illustrates a Red 3 superhero universe, as does Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. Mark Gruenwald's *Squadron Supreme* illustrates a Red 3 universe where the change doesn't go as planned: The superheroes fail to build utopia and wind up wrecking everything they stood for. Even Hyperbrains can't always predict the future.

Red 4

Talents slightly alter the course of history, but tweedy historians can sit back in their armchairs and wave away the contributions of the Indestructible Man to the war effort as "epiphenomenal." Maybe World War II lasts a month longer, or ends a month early; maybe Senator McCarran investigates Communists after Senator McCarthy is killed by a Talented assassin: There are no major changes except cultural and social ripples that damp out after a few months.



Talents can rid themselves of particular, individual pests—defeat Nixon in 1968, for example—but things kind of balance out in the end when President Humphrey also extends Vietnam, establishes the EPA, and gets beaten by Gerald Ford in the 1972 election. (The *Godlike* history is essentially Red 4.)

This level of Redness is good if you want to stick rigorously to history or if you don't actually know a lot of history; minor “mistakes” are actually minor changes to history because of some Talent or other.

Yeah, that's the ticket.

Red 5

Talents don't change the course of history. History can't be changed; time travel either doesn't work or always wraps back around to the previous reality somehow. (See Fritz Leiber's short story “Try and Change the Past” for a really creepy version of this.) Talents can make history, or better yet save history: stopping alien invasions, preventing the insidious Doctor Malevolens from vaporizing the East Coast, that kind of thing. (Talents spend a lot of their time preventing other Talents from actually affecting the world, as it turns out.) But even if the alien invasion, or Doctor Malevolens, gets through and destroys Pittsburgh, it gets rebuilt good as new in a year or so, and life goes on.

Talents can also affect individual lives, of course: Saving innocent bystanders from falling buildings, or beating up muggers, is par for the course. If the person a Talent saved (or crippled) turns out to be important, though, they'll most likely be important mainly to other Talents. Talents primarily deal with each other and operate within each other's social universes.

No foci are manufacturable, or if they are the government keeps them all locked up in a warehouse somewhere.

Gold: Talent Inertia

Gold is one of the least reactive of metals. It retains its color, shape, and tensile strength under almost all conditions; it doesn't combine easily with other elements. Economically, it remains pegged at pretty much the same value over the long haul, occasional bubbles and bursts notwithstanding. In short, gold is a handy metaphor for the way most comic book superheroes operate—no matter how long they've been fighting the good fight, they don't appreciably change.

Furthermore, society's view of superheroes doesn't seem to change, either, which is odd given the vast swings in respect, image, and popularity of Roman Catholics, the military, and the Sex Pistols (for example) over the last fifty years. A high-Gold game world models this tendency: Talents stay in the role they began with, both individually and societally. If the Arachnoid was a creepy vigilante in 1963, he's a creepy vigilante today—regardless of marriage, professional stability, and the respect of his Talented peers. If mutants were hated and feared in 1963, they're still hated and feared today, no matter how many alien invasions they thwart.

Even in a high-Gold world, not all Talents are identical. To continue our example above, society and its stereotypes may differentiate between “evil, untrustworthy mutants” and “heroic, valiant supermen,” if some Talents come from genetic mutation and others spring from latent (or completely unconscious) psychic powers. Society may not even consider Hyperbrains Talents at all, thinking them just very, very gifted “normal people.” However, those categories tend to remain clear, divergent, and solid in the public mind over the decades. The point of increased Goldness isn't that every Talent is in the same boat—it's that they seldom “jump ship.” They don't often seem interested in changing their relationships with society (including other Talents), and society reciprocates this disinterest.

Why You Don't Change: Explaining Goldness

Here are a few solid reasons for high-Gold worlds to stay that way. Again, use any or all of them; they explain the same phenomenon, after all.

Change Is for Quitters: Like Jason's paradigmatic ship, you remain the same no matter how many disasters and repairs you go through. Plenty of normal people after a crisis seemingly pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and continue with their lives as though nothing had happened—and plenty of normal people never have any crisis worth speaking of in the first place. Why shouldn't Talents, even ones who aren't officially Hypercool, be able to do that?

Sure, it may be denial, but it beats trashing Manhattan instead of your apartment if your wife leaves you.

You Value Stability: Mastering your powers means mastering yourself, after all. There's very little point in learning all those danger room routines if you're going to hang it all up to raise goats next month. Talents who keep working tend to keep

stable; your life depends on knowing yourself, which is a lot harder if you keep changing. People, and causes, that might make you change yourself are thus dangerous—best to avoid them and stick with fellow Talents, who understand.

Give the People What They Want: Look, it's called "brand identity," people. The whole reason the cops ever give you evidence, or the Pentagon listens to your crazy scheme, or the hostages stay quiet, is because they know what you're capable of. Why risk that? A Talent always has to be aware (even Hyperaware) of how things look to the normals, because mistakes are so easy with people who aren't bulletproof. Keeping the same costume, the same snappy patter, and the same M.O. helps them fit you into their world, and helps you deal with their world on terms you defined.

These Three Mutants Walk Into a Bar: How many centuries have the stereotypes of cheap Scotsmen, lazy Mexicans, or lascivious Frenchmen been around? If such assumptions can remain common about groups of demonstrably individual, normal

In a very high-Gold world, changing their image, retiring, or learning new skills may never even occur to most Talents; a new uniform every couple of years and the occasional new use for an old power seems to be the limit.

It's probably easier to maintain a high Goldness level in your game. Most players aren't very interested in changing their characters; others are downright resistant to the notion. If you don't offer them chances for personal growth and development, they'll seldom seek them out. A new boyfriend, or a long-lost uncle, seems to be the limit the genre requires, and they usually wind up acting just like the previous iteration of kidnapped romantic interest and well-intentioned meddler.

Players also prefer a game world that's a little less changeable than the real one: They put a lot of effort (ideally) into learning your game world's back story and cast of characters. It can actually be pretty frustrating to show up for the game one day and be informed that Latveria has joined NATO, or to hear that a new medication has cured the Joker—unless it's the hook for a story designed to turn Latveria right back into the evil foreign threat and the Joker back into a homicidal madman.

For low-Gold games, the secret is probably to start off with a wide spectrum of Talents, including a sizable minority who only use their powers to make money, impress chicks, and get on TV. If the players internalize Talents as "famous people"

humans, how much more stubborn are stereotypes of iconic, remote, dangerous, potentially alienated superhumans going to be? Even if there is more than one type of Talent, those types will reinforce each other rather than break down stereotypes in general.

Furthermore, the pressure of society's expectations reinforces those categories. For example, social ostracism of "dangerous, criminal, stand-offish mutants" may drive many (even most) mutants underground or into criminality—if nothing they do matters to human society, they might as well look out for number one, while consorting only with their own kind!

Talents Are Just Like That: Judging nonhumans by human psychological standards is foolish. Talents aren't normal people, and can't be expected to behave as if they are. Sure, the first thing you notice about a Talent is that he can fly and shoot lasers out of his eyes—it takes years of paying attention to notice that he seems somehow immune to changes, a Zen pond in the maelstrom of culture. This, in fact,

is one of those things that subconsciously tends to make people keep their distance from Talents—which, of course, helps further fossilize their opinions of them. Neat, huh?

It's Okay, He Was Dead Last Year, Too: In a world where age, death, crippling injury, and the other traumatic events that usually change people's lives and alter human behavior aren't necessarily inevitable, or permanent, or even particularly likely, it's not unrealistic for Talents to remain less affected by them.

Psychologically, Talents undergoing ordinarily life-changing events remain in denial, believing that the cancer will clear up, their mentor will be proven innocent, or that they'll get another girlfriend just as good as the one who vanished. Often, they're right.

If the rest of society, meanwhile, enjoys no such immunity from trauma or tragedy, this gives them yet another reason to stereotype, alienate, or otherwise refuse to engage Talents—a self-propagating cycle of Goldness.

rather than "iconic characters," they'll be more accepting of changes in fashion and behavior—and might even be interested in exploring such changes in their own characters.

Changing Goldness level in midstream is probably a little bit easier if you're increasing Goldness rather than decreasing it. If the various NPCs solidify (or even fossilize), the players will likely not notice, and even if they do, it's unlikely to throw them out of sympathy with the game world. They'll probably write it off to age and conservatism, or even quietly rejoice that "at least we can stop keeping track of whether Captain Magenta is a wanted criminal this week." Decreasing Goldness can, by contrast, frustrate players whose own plans for af-

fecting the world will get thrown off track if the other Talents aren't reliably good, or dedicated, or hunted by the unjust law. In general, the higher the Goldness level, the bigger the job you will have overcoming its inertia.

Here are some benchmarks for various Goldness levels in your game world:

Gold 1

Talents come in every possible flavor; there are Hypercool baseball managers and fire-breathing porn starlets. Alan Moore's *Top 10* is Gold 1, as are parts of George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* series. Talents have more options than other people; they never wind up backed into a corner or boxed into society's

expectations—if they're hated and feared in New York, they're as likely to move to Paris and become beloved talk-show hosts as to turn to a life of crime.

These are good games to run if you're trying to explore the effects of Talents on society, and if your players are tolerant of (or eager fans of) social experimentation and picaresque story telling. Rapidly changing the reactions of the man in the street, or the publisher of the Daily Bugle, to the player characters will help bring a Gold 1 world to life and personalize its impact.

Make sure that you are willing to let the heroes off the hook; permanent police grudges and obsessed arch-foes are just as unlikely in this world as unquestioned heroism and secret identities.

Gold 2

In general, society pigeonholes Talents (or some subtypes of Talents) the same way it does every social group: Accountants are boring, Irishmen are pugnacious, young girls like horses, Talents are flamboyant and a little dangerous. But not everyone thinks that way, and individual Talents can and do easily overcome such stereotypes, which hardly have the weight of prejudice.

In a Gold 2 world, Talents are somewhat more likely to change than normal people; in this they resemble celebrities (who swing between “flavor of the month” and “where are they now?”) or professional wrestlers. Especially in Gold 2 campaigns with a fairly long history (or detailed back story), many Talents have retired, gotten hugely fat,

Silver Threads Among the Gold: One Big Change

Even in the Goldest of universes, big changes can happen to individual Talents and to their relationships with the world and each other. These changes, perhaps because such change is rare, often become the spines of major stories.

Plenty of big stories revolve around changes that wind up being reversed again—Batman breaks his spine, or the Hulk retains Bruce Banner's intellect, or Superman dies. These don't count; the immunity of Talents to the effects of ordinarily life-shattering events, and those events' common, even usual, reversibility, is part of what makes a world Gold in the first place.

But occasionally, things change that seem (the constraints of serial storytelling aside) to be both permanent and important—Spider-Man gets married, Batgirl is crippled, Oliver Queen loses all his money and becomes a socialist, Green Lantern destroys a city. Such things, in a high-Gold world,

are not so much changes in a hero as they are major events that essentially transform characters into new characters. (In the instances of Batgirl and Green Lantern, this is literally the case—they became Oracle and the new Spectre, respectively, as a result of their traumas.) These new characters are, and remain, just as iconic and invulnerable to social and personal transformations as their previous incarnations were; the big change affects them both more and less than it would a normal or more “realistic” person.

In some cases, the change not only affects the Talent's future, but his past as well. The hero's history has retroactively altered; he was always the way he is today. In older comic books, for example, Superman was an orphan twice over: Both his Kryptonian and Earthly parents were dead. In the current comic book continuity, however, his human parents are still alive and always have been. Superman's parents have been “ret-conned” (from “retroactive continuity”) back into existence by the writers.

died, converted, become corrupt, run for office, or slacked off and wasted their potential. They can provide excellent NPCs for such games, and make a nice interface between the world of Talents and the world of normal mundane humanity. Brian Michael Bendis' *Powers* seems to stay at Gold 2.

Gold 3

Talents are no different than normal folks. Most Talents, like most people, live their lives in a fairly straight track, barring unexpected or unusual circumstances. Most Talents, like most people, meet social expectations, but for any round hole there's always a square peg in eyeshot. Talents may find themselves drawn to certain occupations (soldier, vigilante, secret agent, bank robber), much like

math or computer whizzes do, but it's hardly an innate birthright or an immutable destiny.

Games set at Gold 3 can split the difference between a reliable world with superhero genre elements and a Hypersoap opera driven by fashion and chance. However, if the role of Talent doesn't mean anything more than the role of "architect," it may be harder to find thematic hooks for epic storytelling. It may be best to see Gold 3 as either a default ceiling for more frenetic low-Gold games, or as a floor for four-color Gold 5 campaigns. Individual Talents (whether PCs or NPCs) can live lives or pursue careers at Gold 3 even in a much Golder universe (see **Silver Threads Among the Gold**, page 172), as the "exceptions that prove the rule."

The most visible and widespread ret-conning springs from the re-launch of most superhero comics in the 1960s after their cancellation in the 1940s. New versions of the Flash, the Human Torch, and other heroes had entirely new secret identities, arch-nemeses, personal histories, costumes, and in some cases completely new powers.

Later, in some cases, the "old" history was retroactively attached to the new: Captain America of the 1960s had, it turned out, been alive in the 1940s, but had been frozen in a glacier in the meantime. The "new" Captain America was the same, therefore, as the "old" one. In other cases the "old" version of the character began to meet and interact with the new version: The 1960s Flash began as a complete ret-con of the 1940s Flash, then "crossed the dimensional barrier" to meet the 1940s Flash, and then (after the whole world shifted again) became the protégé of the 1940s Flash, now an aged, respected mentor in his own past.

The whole concept is an artifact of the pressure of monthly comic storytelling over decades; it has nothing to do with the actual construction of a superhero world, and ret-conning (unlike colorful costumes) isn't really part of even the four-color genre. There's no reason to do it in a roleplaying game, although if your campaign runs for twenty years, you'll be forgiven if you want to try it. Unless your intent is to explore issues of memory, perception, and shifting reality in your game (much as Grant Morrison did in his run on *Animal Man*), any ret-conning of the past in your world should remain offstage. Characters, even player characters, should not "remember" their superseded past—to them, things have always been as they are now. For this reason, don't ret-con the player characters without the players' consent (or, ideally, participation). If, for whatever reason, you ret-con other aspects of the game world, you run the risk of damaging player identification with and acceptance of your campaign.

Gold 4

In general, Talents (or specific types of Talents) have a recognizable public role: They resemble policemen, Congressmen, or soldiers. Their role (and the public perception of it) changes over time, but only in response to major social upheavals, massive scandals or other large-scale stimuli. Peer pressure, or other factors such as an ongoing crisis like World War II, keep Talents acting according to social expectations of them.

A Talent that differs from the social norm stands out and draws attention; if enough of them do the same, then society differentiates between “Talents” and “renegades” (or “mutants” or “proles” or “super-criminals,” depending on the specifics of the public images involved). A game focusing on such roles (“hunted mutants” vs. “Hyper Ops” for example), or one with an underlying story arc of social change or crisis, will thrive at this level. The world of *God-like* is Gold 4.

Gold 5

Talents, or the specific subtypes of Talents, know their place—and so does everybody else. In many (perhaps most) Gold 5 campaigns, an individual Talent might be accepted, hunted, law-abiding, heroic, or murderous—and come hell, high water, or the Replicon Invasion, they’re going to stay that way. Society as a whole doesn’t seek to impact Talents, or doesn’t change its approach if it does.

A Gold 5 society might even go to the extreme of never questioning why only Talents seem to have flying cars, teleport tubes, and cosmic rods—that’s just what Talents do, it seems, and if you had a flying car, a teleport tube, and a cosmic rod, you’d be a Talent, too.

With cooperative players, maintaining a Gold 5 campaign should be fairly easy, since it replicates conventional comic-book reality.

Blue: The Lovely and the Pointless

Alan Moore once referred to Wonder Woman’s invisible plane as “just the sort of lovely and pointless idea we should encourage.” Not only her invisible plane, but much of Wonder Woman’s mythos—living Greek gods, lost civilizations of Amazon warriors, people made out of statues, a magic lasso that makes you tell the truth, and so on—seems to spring from out of the blue. And it’s not even the most unusual stuff in the DC Universe; Wonder Woman seems almost normal compared to Dr. Fate, or Swamp Thing, or Titano the Super-Gorilla. A truly Blue four-color world has several different pantheons of gods, eight or nine known alien races (some of which have invaded the Earth in the recent past), sorcerers supreme and undead superheroes, sword-swinging angels (fallen and otherwise), a few parallel dimensions ruled by evil overlords or talking monkeys, a lost civilization, and at minimum one Hell complete with demonic agents on Earth. None of which ever really affects the price of a cup of coffee.

This can be a lot to swallow, and you may not want to throw it all at your players at once. If only one player character has a Bluish origin, any Blue stories in your game can concentrate on her back story and leave the alien gods out of it as a distraction. It’s easy to make a world more Blue; it’s much harder to remove Blueness later. (“Say, how did that alien invasion come out, anyway?”)

One way to move from high-Blue to low-Blue reality is to posit a “crash” from an Age of Wonder: the magic stopped working, or the gods left this plane, or the aliens declared Earth under intergalactic quarantine, or Atlantis sank forever. This crash can have happened in ancient times, or a few generations ago, or last year, or during the campaign (if you want to make the Reality Crash a major theme of your game). But this doesn’t work more than once or twice; otherwise, you’re back to



a high-Blue world punctuated by lovely and pointless disasters.

Create what your players ask for, and don't drown them in wacky irrelevancies; you don't have to re-invent the entire multi-decade run of *Strange Adventures*, or even *Action Comics*, to tell superhero stories. In fact, you may want to steer clear of Blueness altogether; it can seem silly, trite, or discordant when juxtaposed with stories of global terrorism, world war, urban crime or corruption in high places. But the sheer effervescent joy and the limitless story possibilities of a highly Blue world offer their own possibilities. After all, somehow Marvel Comics manages to hold Hell's Kitchen and Asgard together. You, too, can work as Blue as you'd like in your own game.

Here are some benchmarks for various Blueness levels in your game world:

Blue 1

The only paranormal things in the world are Talents; mankind is effectively alone in the universe. Gods and their existence remain a matter of theology and faith. Talents likely have a "point source" (see page 185) origin or explanation, although a series of relatively "mundane" or quasi-scientific origins (experimental radiation, mutants, psionics) will also work in a Blue 1 universe. The world of *Godlike* is essentially Blue 1, as are various "hard" science fiction or cyberpunk worlds. A gritty game centering primarily on human concerns like crime, racism, war or politics works best (or at least has fewer distractions) in a Blue 1 world.

Blue 2

A Blue 2 universe closely resembles a Blue 1 universe to the casual observer. Alien contact, if any, happened long ago, or to a very few people. Magic is minor, or hidden, or unreliable. The gods, if any, work in mysterious ways rather than by descending to Earth to fight super-villains. The acceptable

Why Weirdness Still Feels Normal: Explaining Blueness

Presenting—a few amazing reasons for high-Blue worlds to stay that way. Although consistency is even more foolish in a high-Blue world than most, most of these explanations are consistent with each other.

We Have Always Been at War With Atlantis:

This is the way it's always been. Gods, and aliens, and sorcery are accepted just like metalworking, and agriculture, and cities—they're part of the normal flow of history. Oddly enough (except it's not "odd" to you, it's "logical" or "historically inevitable") all that strangeness balanced itself out, and modern society is very close to the way it would be in a world without Blueness.

Go With the Flow: Somehow people got used to TV, and airplanes, and porn on the Internet. There's no inherent psychological reason why it should be any harder to get used to Lemurians, or alien tourists, or time-traveling robots. If there's one thing that modern, sensation-driven, capitalist culture is good at, it's reducing everything to a nice, marketable, comprehensible, common denominator. Green trumps Blue every time.

Just Because It's On TV Doesn't Make It Real:

Sure, there are aliens and magicians and ancient gods and transdimensional imps running around—but how many people deal with them full time, or even as often as they do with real-life celebrities or physicists?

The average man in the street can go on with his life and ignore the weirdness because it usually doesn't happen to him; it's like famine or Ebola, or like high-temperature superconductors or space probes. Sure, it's important—it's just not worth a lot of attention.

I Accept Gorilla Grodd As My Personal Savior:

If you can't beat them, join them. No doubt plenty of people let weirdness into their lives, or even let it run their lives. These people are freaks and weirdos, the butt of society's jokes. Taking any of this stuff seriously is embarrassing, not wise. Nut cults act as a kind of insulator; people likely to be unhinged by the strangeness join them, and drop out of the larger culture. The larger culture will then "interpret" anything really important, and people can slowly accept it as normal in their own pace.

It Comes With The Suit: The world is full of weirdness, all right, but it's all aimed at the Talents—or filtered through them. Normal people encounter magic, or aliens, only when they encounter a magic, or alien, Talent. In some sense, this might be because weird happenings often create emergencies that only Talents can deal with—firemen tend to run into more fires than most people, too. It might be that whatever causes Talents also causes (or comes from) paranormal energies or beings.

And, of course, it might be that Talents spend all their time looking for weirdness, so of course they're going to find it. You know what they say, after all: "If all you've got is a cosmic power blast, everything looks like an invasion from a parallel dimension."

Strange Days, Indeed: Actually, normal people do, in fact, think that all the talking tigers and green alien armadas and sorcerous elder gods are very, very strange and unsettling. Normal society survives as a defensive reaction to such insanity; by seeking refuge in mundanity, people hope they can avoid confronting the madness.

Of course, as a Talent you don't have that option.

borders of pseudo-science may be a little looser than on a Blue 1 world, but society takes no notice. A Blue 2 world is one of low-level oddness, and self-policing strangeness. It resembles the world of *The X-Files*, or the “surface world” of Warren Ellis’ *Planetary*. This is a good setting for games centering on covertly exploring the unknown, or with themes of hidden truth and uncertainty. Like *Planetary*, many of those games may be about uncovering the much higher-Blue “secret history” of the game world.

Blue 3

Something Blue has happened—magic has returned, the aliens have invaded, Atlantis has risen—and this world has felt the effects. Such a Big Blue makes an excellent change point for an alternate history setting; even if the broader history of the world continues to parallel our own, culture and society have been reshaped to some extent. Interestingly, a world vastly different from ours can still seem less strange, and hence less Blue, than a “close parallel” Blue 5 world like the DC Universe if all the differences in the lower-Blue world seem to logically follow from (or thematically mesh with) a single Blue event.

George R.R. Martin’s *Wild Cards* universe is a paradigmatic Blue 3 world, deriving virtually all of its wildness from an alien species and its bio-weapon. A world of “secret horror” like *Hellblazer* or *Tomb of Dracula* might also be considered Blue 3; this level of Blueness seems about right for a world with a limited but foregrounded repertoire of undeniably supernatural, paranormal, or inhuman elements. Unlike a Blue 2 *X-Files* world, in which the strange is always strange, in a Blue 3 world, at least some strangeness has become “usual,” if not “normal.” (Perhaps the best way to explain the difference is that Scully lives in a Blue 2 world, whereas Mulder inhabits a Blue 3 cosmos.) Games focusing on a single aspect of Blue-

ness, or supernatural alternate histories, work well at Blue 3; restrict the lovely and pointless elements to those that reinforce the plot or themes of your campaign.

Blue 4

Around this point on the Blue spectrum, the world contains a great deal of weirdness—and hence, comes to accept it more nonchalantly. Things that would be the news story of the century in a lower-Blue world—such as an ancient Norse god coming back to life, or contact with aliens—seem to fit into a Blue 4 world without a ripple. Not only Talents, but angels, parallel dimensions, and magic have accepted places in the cultural world view.

An alien invasion, the awakening of Earth itself to sentience, or events of a similar scale would probably seem unprecedented in a Blue 4 world, but a single alien ambassador or a living mountain is par for the course. A world in which one flavor (or a set of related flavors) of the supernatural is dominant, such as worlds of high fantasy, could also be considered Blue 4. In this type of Blue 4 world, the strange isn’t merely “business as usual,” it’s the way business gets done.

Maintaining a world at Blue 4, without slipping into Blue 5, probably requires a fairly mundane, or normal, story focus—the temptation in Blue-centric stories is to increase the scope and spectacle. A Blue 4 world makes a good superheroic backdrop without overwhelming the action. If the Talents in a campaign have many different origins, you may wind up with a Blue 4 background by default. Fortunately, the very “ordinariness” of the extraordinary means that you don’t have to focus on it, if you don’t want to.

Blue 5

In a Blue 5 world anything goes, and although many things seem extraordinary, none of them alter the world to speak of—or if they do, Talents put

things right and life continues as before. Believing that a man can fly is no less peculiar, for the average citizen of a Blue 5 world, than believing in an invisible city of intelligent gorillas—and no more important to her daily life. The lovely and the pointless exist side by side with the ordinary and the scientific, and society as a whole never seems particularly exercised about the difference.

Even the seemingly incompatible types of Blue-ness—the simultaneous existence of ancient Greek gods and avenging Christian angels, or time travelers and alien artifacts from completely different futures—never raise a questioning eyebrow. Blue 5 worlds, in a sense, reify the “many worlds” theory of quantum mechanics—all possible universes are true at once. Since both the DC and Marvel Universes share Blue 5 assumptions, any game with cooperative players that doesn’t dig too strenuously into theology or epistemology can cruise along at Blue 5 endlessly without a hitch.

Black: Moral Clarity

In a four-color universe, things are pretty black and white. Good heroes battle evil villains, and a sock in the jaw settles things more often than not. Great social questions might remain troublesome—or, with a sufficiently great Talent, they might not. Even when there is more than one right answer to a question, it’s always pretty clear that one of them is the rightest. And if you have any doubt about it, you can always look up in the sky.

A game with this level of moral clarity has little gray in it; it’s a clear, crisp Black. Its moral conventions extend from the notion that comic books and superhero stories are juvenile fiction, with a moral purpose. This isn’t to say that it’s necessarily simplistic, or even unsophisticated. A post-modern, seemingly cynical comic book such as *The Authority* by Warren Ellis has just as little doubt about the rights and wrongs of its superhero punch-fests as any issue of *Superman* from the 1950s. (In fact,

by urging global political action on Talents with global power levels, comics such as *The Authority* present an even more morally stark philosophy than those which assume that superheroes should not intervene in complex issues of politics and economics.) And virtually every great artist worth the name, from Dante to Shakespeare to Jack Kirby, has believed that moral instruction is part of the goal of art.

It can, however, be detrimental to the goal of fiction—of presenting a believable world. Most problems that players (and GMs) encounter in their lives aren’t immediately susceptible to straightforward good vs. evil dialectic. They’re even less susceptible to a punch in the jaw. It’s easy to come up with situations—in history or in current affairs—in which the seeming evil is justified by a greater good, or in which two vile or imperfect forces demand a choice between them. In the real world, nobody sane (and very few madmen) is “evil for the sake of evil” in proper Darkseid fashion. Even thoroughgoing villains of the deepest dye—Himmler, Stalin, Osama bin Laden—operate based on a moral code. In fact, all three of the foregoing were primarily driven (at least initially) by goals they saw as unselfish, noble, and greater than themselves. Many four-color villains from Magneto to Luthor show at least flashes of the same thinking; presenting these shades of meaning, while keeping their villainy clear and present, can help paint patches of gray into a high-Black world.

It’s important to note that individual characters’ morality can align with any of the various Black-ness levels, despite the inherent moral clarity of the world as a whole. However, a high-Black hero will find himself a joke or an unwitting pawn of the unscrupulous in a low-Black world, while a Black 2 amoral Talent will rapidly become a thoroughgoing villain in the eyes of a Black 5 society. In a superhero game it’s important to let players know what the game’s moral assumptions are. More than

Why Right Makes Might: Explaining Blackness

Herewith, a few reasons for high-Black worlds to stay that way. No doubt theologians or ethicists could pick holes in them, but hopefully players will know that it's Wrong to do so.

What Part of "God" Did You Not Understand?

God exists, and He is Good, and He is not shy about sending the occasional angel, spirit of divine vengeance, or shining knight down to Earth to sort things out if need be.

In a world of Talents explicitly drawing powers from Heaven, it's perhaps unsurprising that moral choices are a little clearer for everyone. God helps those who help themselves, and He especially helps those who help Him, too.

No, Literally, We Look Up to Him: A quick perusal of the most implacably moral characters in, say, the DC Universe indicates that they totally maxed out Hypercommand. "Because Superman does it that way" is almost more of a physical law than a mere moral guideline; your universe can have a similarly irresistible role model for its good Talents. It helps if your role model is physically irresistible as well; for some reason, it's harder to say that old-fashioned Kansas decency is "corny" or "outdated" if it can toss a battleship into orbit.

The Banality of Evil: In a universe with an active God, or even "just" a perfect man from the sky,

being evil is not just wrong, it's pretty stupid. What kind of idiot tugs on God's cape? Not only that, if God is both indisputably good and indisputably real, rejecting Him is almost by definition suicidal. Good thus defeats evil because evil actually wants to lose.

The GM can play that mechanically, penalizing the Will of evil characters, or just keep the fundamentally self-defeating nature of evil in mind when scripting adventures. Evil is thus stupid and self-hating. It's why bad guys tie good guys up in ludicrously over-complicated death traps, it's why supposed masterminds scatter the scenery with clues, it's why nobody ever uses their spacetime alteration ray to do anything but rob jewelry stores.

God Plays Dice With the Universe: Look, it's pretty likely that unless the GM is a real sadist, the player character Talents will face obstacles they can defeat, puzzles they can solve, and villains they can pound. Multiple player brains can almost always tactically out-think a single GM brain, which is another advantage that the side of righteousness (which is to say, the player characters' side) possesses. In addition, any given player is far more likely to wring the dice and the game rules for every drop of advantage for her hero than the GM is for any given NPC—the incentive just doesn't exist for the GM to work that hard and be that anal. Do we have to draw you a map? Obviously, the world likes heroes. Now shut up and hero, hero.

any of the other three axes, working out the level of Blackness in your game with your players will help maintain thematic unity, avoid unpleasant "assumption clash," and let everyone get onto the same comic-book page.

Here are some benchmarks for various Blackness levels in your game world:

Black 1

A number of conflicting moral duties, and even divergent moral codes, exist. Deciding between them remains up to the individual conscience; there is no enforcement mechanism except legal systems or social ostracism. Telling the difference between "evil" and "good" is impossible; there are no moral absolutes. Killing is purely a pragmatic question—can you do it? Can you get away from those who

would avenge it, be they the police or the victim's family? This world is even less moral than that of the Nietzschean Superman, who at least has a duty to his own will. Often, in a Black 1 campaign, this nihilism extends to the game table: Players aren't obliged to help each other by a meta-game "contract," and the GM isn't obliged to play fair with the enemies or obstacles. Games in which Talents seek to explore and stress-test their own moral codes, or games of amoral struggle, might flourish in this environment. A Black 1 game might find a post-apocalyptic setting congenial, as long as the campaign stays away from the issues of rebuilding civilization, or establishing frontier justice.

Black 2

Although there are still no absolute embodiments of good or evil, there are some means by which choices can be made. Killing is unpleasant, or even uncouth. Usually, at the very minimum, the player characters share a common moral framework, which creates a structure of reward, punishment, and evaluation. For example, in the *Godlike* setting, although individual Germans may still be noble people, and even Hitler acts from understandable (if not rational) motives inherent in his own moral law, it's clear to most player groups that Nazi Germany is the "bad guys."

This doesn't necessarily make America or Britain—to say nothing of the Soviet Union—the "good guys," of course. A game set in the Vietnam War—or any war—might present the same moral assumptions. Even the most hard-bitten game of war or outlawry will probably find a Black 2 setting congenial; it's difficult to remain interested in stories about nothing except your individual aggrandizement.

Black 3

By this point, matters have clarified sufficiently that good and evil are evident, but far from overwhelmingly obvious. People of good will can (and will) still differ on not just means but on ultimate ends—some questions of morality and ethics may still have "no right answer," although the concept of a "right answer" is at least theoretically imaginable. Good people do not kill outside a clear moral framework such as war or revenge.

This is not just mushy secular liberalism, or at least it needn't be; non-liberal ethics like bushido, the Spartan warrior code, Puritan witch-hunting, Islamic sharia law, and the like may appeal to various Talents—and produce effective, generally decent societies when applied.

The other perhaps uncomfortable facet of a Black 3 world is that the broader good, which by nature tends to the self-constrained and heterogeneous, is at a systemic disadvantage when opposing an aggressive, unified force of evil. *Godlike* is workable at Black 3, as are other narratives of self-hampering, self-doubting right against overwhelming might such as *Camelot 3000*.

Games focusing on extensive in-character moral debate or discussion should probably settle on Black 3 to keep any kind of real seriousness. Attempting to game out moral problems in a Blacker world will quickly devolve, at best, to well-meaning preachiness of the "Hard-Traveling Heroes" Green Lantern-Green Arrow sort. ("You see, Hal, your power ring can't punch child poverty with a boxing glove!" "Gosh, Ollie! You've really opened my eyes!")

Black 4

Good and evil are clear, although an expansive gray area exists. People of good will no longer differ on ultimate ends—all good people believe, for example, in working for Truth and Justice, although they may wonder if the American Way is always the right way to get them. Personal ethics will still conflict, and even universally acknowledged goods can come into opposition—how do you ensure both Liberty and Equality, after all? Good people regret killing, even when there is no good alternative.

Solving moral problems in a Black 4 world can still require some uncomfortable confrontations of that sort, but most of them can be worked through. A Black 4 superhero never lets the perfect be the enemy of the good enough. Classic war comics generally have a Black 4 feel to them.

Most contemporary DC and Marvel comics try to hover around a Black 4 level, with occasional dips down for the Punisher or upward for Superman. This is probably a workable compromise in games where moral questions don't take center stage—blowing up a Skrull dreadnought that's attacking Seattle is not an agonizing choice for most Black 4 Talents. After all, in a Black 4 world the Skrull might win!

Black 5

That's not the case in most Black 5 worlds. The righteous choice is also the right choice; good is fated to win because evil hampers itself through selfishness, short-sightedness, and motiveless waste and cruelty. (To be fair, this is pretty much

why the Axis lost the real World War II, and why the Soviets lost the Cold War. Maybe we live in a comic-book world after all.) Good and Evil are clear and absolute, and a gray area is an area that nobody has examined closely enough to figure out the right answer. (Although admittedly, it may take Hypervision to see it.)

Good people don't kill. Killing is always a moral choice: It is never forced upon you. To a lesser (or less important) extent, this is true of all sins, but ending another's life must always be a choice, and the killer always bears the responsibility for it. At high enough levels of power, the responsibility of heroes to improve the world may come into play—*Miracleman* and *The Authority*, for example, are both presented as essentially Black 5 worlds.

In more standard four-color settings, the superheroes restrain themselves from altering society, or invading foreign despotisms—possibly because such restraint is in fact the greater Good, or perhaps because such alterations and interventions always create their own tragedies. Otherwise, solving moral problems is a mere tactical puzzle, involving figuring out what supervillain is behind the seeming dilemma, or discovering which party in a conflict is the most Good and thus the most deserving of success.

The classic Silver Age DC Universe was a Black 5 universe and proud of it. Assuming that players either all agree with the world's Good, or all agree to refrain from making problems with it, this classic superhero vibe can easily translate into a successful campaign.

Realism, Gritty and Otherwise

How often have you seen a discussion of comic books that contrasts “four-color superheroes” with “gritty realism,” as though the two were somehow the opposite of each other? Realism is actually a kind of fifth color, or even a fifth palette of colors; no superhero comic, after all, is going to be as “realistic,” in the dictionary definition of the word, as a true-crime or police-procedural comic, or even a romance comic! In practice, comic book realism means something specific but hard to define, an ingredient related to—but not identical with—“the way our world actually works.”

When discussing comic books, “realistic” is often used as a kind of code word for “depressing.” If you’re a conservative, or a pessimist, or a Chicago Cubs fan, the two terms can almost seem like synonyms. For liberal, optimistic New York Yankees fans, devotion to realism just gets in the way of glory, goodness and triumph. At some level, that’s just fine: your game has superheroes in it, for crying out loud, and it’s a little late to lock the realism barn door now. On the other hand, if the Talents are the only unrealistic (or super-realistic) element of the setting (as with *Godlike*), you can play up themes of alienation, stark choices and moral contrasts, and make many other artistic decisions with greater ease and clarity.

With many folks, a quick nod to realism suffices: “People act differently with Talents in the world.” This thesis has the advantage of being immune to testing, which means nobody can disprove it. Just papering over the cracks is often good enough; there are invisible gorilla invasions to thwart, after all! With other people—and perhaps for your own peace of mind as world-builder and GM—you sometimes have to keep it more, well, real. Actions have consequences, utopia doesn’t exist, and

people—even Talents—lie to each other and to themselves more often than not.

Decide in the early stages how realistic (and, hence, potentially depressing) to make your game world, and what type of realism best anchors you and your players in it. You can’t add (or remove) realism in mid-game without at the very least jarring the players out of their sense of how your setting operates—find a level you’re comfortable with and build it in (or at least paper it over) early. The same goes for the various venues for and types of realism. Which ones does your game depend on? Which ones will endanger it?

Everybody’s belief suspends differently; some people can gleefully ignore the realities of physics, but require grim realism in personal behavior—they believe in Superman, but not Robin. Others can hand-wave any amount of technical blarney, but get hung up on economics—teleport tubes are fine, as long as someone is marketing them sensibly. And, probably, vice versa. There’s a really sweet hand-wave you can use for the economic side of things, if your players will let you: The added economic boost from the various Talent foci, Talented crop-seeding, disaster relief, or whatever all pretty much gets sucked up rebuilding things after Talents destroy downtown Philadelphia fighting each other every month.

Realism and Four-Color Stories

It’s important, by the way, to note that devotion to realism in any form doesn’t necessarily mean playing a low-Blue game. Determining and enforcing the realistic impact of alien contact, revealed angels, or even invisible gorilla invasions—or any other lovely or pointless development—has little to do with the putative realism of the development itself.

Like the presence of Talents themselves, these seemingly “unrealistic” interruptions take on whole new layers of potential story and meaning against a thoroughly realistic background. The realistic

unwillingness of many people to believe the Daily Planet headlines—or to fully trust seemingly altruistic Talents—might make for some interesting roleplaying fodder.

On that note, high-Black games, for example, can be entirely realistic as well—as long as the available moral choices within the story are as stark as they potentially were throughout the very real World War II. Genuine acts of selfless heroism are not unrealistic. They happen every day in the real world, and they can happen in your game as well. All stories select events: “Grittily realistic dramas” and “unsophisticated punch-em-ups” can both happen in the same universe, or even the same city. Both types of stories can be spun out of the same narrative elements—or even out of the same events. Compare, for example, *Raging Bull* and *Rocky*. They’re both boxing movies. Neither one involves superpowers or fantasy elements of any kind. One is “grittily realistic,” and one is a romantic fable—and it’s not the plot or the characters that make the difference, but rather the way each story is told.

The Question of Talents

Once you’ve plotted the boundaries of your world, it’s time to start filling in the panels. To begin with, you need to determine where the Talents fit in. Some of those questions—how the law sees Talents, or whether Talents habitually keep secret identities, for example—are too specific for this level of design. Those kinds of decisions depend on the specific story you want to tell, and will probably vary from country to country or even from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Talents in a corrupt Mexico may be allowed to wander around masked as long as they keep the Federales sweet, while Talents in Singapore may all be tagged with radar trackers at all times, with not just their true identities but their DNA and fingerprints on file. Mutants may be persecuted in Houston and allowed to let it all hang out in San Francisco; a caped vigilante may

be a local hero on the South Side and a wanted man on the North Side.

To design a whole world of Talents, you have to break things down at their most basic: How many Talents are there? What’s their distribution—both geographically and in power level? The answers to those questions may be informed by other questions, but do not depend on them.

For example, you can decide that there are about 100 “important” Talents in the world, most of them based in New York City, without deciding a thing about their origins or the nature of Talent powers. The first questions are vital for world design. The other questions may be important to the ongoing story, but if you don’t already know the answer, you can always make it up later.

Legions or Loners?

How many Talents does your setting require? Are your players’ characters the World’s Finest Heroes, or the Legion of Substitute Substitutes? Those are related questions at the narrow end—if there are only ten Talents in the world, and your players are portraying five of them, well, their power level drives your story. At the broad end, the player characters’ power levels will likely depend on the specific story you (and they) want to tell.

You can build a fairly deep setting with a relative handful of Talents—even by 1969, the Marvel Universe only contained about 30 or 40 superheroes, each with four or five villainous nemeses. Along with a scattering of mole men and alien invaders, those 250 or so Talents were enough for a decade’s worth of the House of Ideas. On the other end of the scale, the *Godlike* world presupposes a very high ratio of Talents—around 1 in 10,000 people in the United States, 1 in 8,000 in the German Reich, and possibly 1 in 2,500 Soviets! As a general rule, the more you want your player characters to blend in and have “normal lives,” the larger the Talent background you should build.

Numbers aren't the sole determinant, though. Equally important is the Talents' power distribution. Although you can organize Talent power levels to suit yourself, one good rule of thumb is the "80/20 factor" or "Pareto Principle." This general statistical trend holds that, for many phenomena, 80% of the result likely stems from only 20% of the probable causes.

For example, it's a truism in any sales force that 20% of the salesmen make 80% of the sales. To save yourself some design sweat, it's at least not unreasonable to assume that the same principle applies to Talents—20% of Talents have 80% of the power. And, like many 80/20 "sparse-factor" phenomena, it can keep narrowing upward. Perhaps of that upper 20%, only 20% have 80% of that power, and so on up the scale.

How would a Pareto-distributed super world look? Let's assume a medium Talent level; a global population of 10,000 Talents, or roughly one Talent per 700,000 people in our 21st century.

Using the *Godlike* setting guide of 50 Points in powers and Base Will for a "maximum" Talent, that means the toughest 2,000 Talents (20% of the Talent pool) have 100,000 Points among them. This implies that those 100,000 Points make up 80% of the available Points. The other 8,000 Talents (80% of Talents) split the remaining 25,000 Points (20% of Points) in the world. Let's leave those losers behind and return to the top 20% of Talents. Of those 2,000 Talents, a further 400 are ultra-super; they have 80% of the first 80%, or 80,000 Points. That's 500 Points apiece—on average. Of course, those ultra-super Talents might have still more super Talents among them; it all depends, in the final analysis, of how steep you want to build the power pyramid. You may want to monkey with the numbers a bit to build a "quasi-Pareto" power pyramid that matches the rules guidelines slightly better.

A fairly steep quasi-Pareto distribution would look something like this. Of a global population of 10,000 Talents and 125,000 Points:

- 8,000 Talents have up to 5 Points apiece.
- 1,600 have (around) 15 Points apiece.
- 320 have (around) 50 Points apiece.
- 64 have (around) 200 Points apiece.
- 13 have (around) 785 Points apiece.
- 3 have (around) 13,650 Points apiece.

Where those three cosmic-mega-hyper-ultra-super Talents live might determine the course of your world (except in very high-Red games) as much as—or more than—the list of countries with nuclear weapons.

Talent Distribution

This question, more than any other in this section, will directly drive the shape of your world. Therefore, it's worth a bit of thought; the following are some possible principles to apply.

American, Etc.

Most comic books are published by American companies. Thus, they present a world where the vast majority of the superheroes—and certainly all the important, powerful ones—are American. Other countries sometimes have one or two "national heroes", and countries like Russia or Canada may even have whole super-teams, but when the aliens invade the Earth, or disaster strikes anywhere around the world, it's up to American Talents to save the day.

As a general rule, in the majority of superhero campaigns it probably makes sense to place a preponderance of Talent (both in power and in numbers) in the world's superpowers, with the plurality in the player characters' home nation, should they have the good fortune to live in a superpower. This helps to enrich the setting with lots of local color, while maintaining the geopolitical logic of your history or politics. Obviously, particularly high-

Red games won't need to pay quite as much attention to the question—Dr. Doom hasn't made Latveria a global power, after all, or even given it a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. In any world with a superpower America, it makes both comic-book sense and historical sense to load the States with superheroes.

Point Source

Some superworlds feature a single source for superpowers; the best example is George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* setting, in which an alien starship detonates a bio-weapon over New York City in 1946. Thus, superpowers spread out from New York in space and time—by the 1980s, there are a few superheroes elsewhere in the world (as the toxin spreads on the wind) but New York (and America in general) remains superhero central.

In your own world, you can pick such a point either arbitrarily or historically. A few possible examples:

- A meteor hit a small town in Kansas in 1938, and its radiation has spread slowly through the water system of North America ever since. Most Talents are Americans, and Midwestern Americans at that, with the relevant cultural beliefs and moral codes.
- Superpowers are atomic mutations. They spread out from Chicago in 1942, or Alamogordo in 1945, or Hiroshima in 1945, or Bikini Atoll in 1946, or Semipalatinsk in 1949. Global fallout patterns carry Talent mutations in their wake; Chernobyl spawned Talents in 1986.
- The Tunguska bolide strike of 1908, or the Philadelphia Experiment of 1943, or the Roswell UFO crash in New Mexico in 1947, opened hyperspace to an alien intelligence and began to change people in an expanding geographical area based on an unguessable program.
- Nikola Tesla's immense electrical tests in Telluride, Colorado in 1899 (or Wardenclyffe, Long

Island in 1905) set up a resonance with human DNA that unleashed the Talent codes.

- Any number of laboratory accidents, meteor strikes, alien landings, random diseases, and so forth could be the trigger for the Talent Event. This is an excellent way to suddenly decide that, say, Sri Lanka is a superpower—that's where the divine Talent energies in Adam's Tooth suddenly exploded in 1996, on the six thousandth birthday of the world.

Per Capita

Rather than being all clumped up in one country or centered on a zero point with a smattering elsewhere, Talents might be divided up randomly across the globe in proportion to the world's population.

The following table gives the number of Talents present in various regions around the world, assuming an equal distribution of Talents by population. The table gives the breakdowns for different years, to allow you to set your campaign in different eras. It assumes a global Talent pool of 10,000 Talents for any given year. (For more Talents, multiply; for fewer, divide by whatever variable you think should reflect your world's makeup.) If you plan on giving your campaign a long history, you can pro-rate the number of Talents in the world using the percentages in parentheses and the examples given.

- 200 A.D. is the height of the Roman Empire (which probably has around 2,000 Talents in it) and classical civilization generally. (World population is 4% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 400 Talents in it, 80 of them within the Roman Empire.)
- 1200 A.D. is a fairly representative medieval year during the Crusades, before the Black Death comes along in 1330. (World population is 7% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 700 Talents in it, around 90 of them Christian and another 90 Moslem.)

Number of Talents Out of 10,000 Worldwide, By Year (A.D.)

Area	200	1200	1750	1880	1940	1975	2000	2050
Africa	818	955	1,017	655	599	987	1,324	1,992
—Egypt	227	101	63	56	68	95	112	127
Asia	5,909	6,281	6,495	6,342	5,991	5,897	6,303	5,823
—China	2,684	2,889	3,521	2,960	2,268	2,141	2,112	1,549
—India	1,773	2,085	2,660	1,762	1,369	1,538	1,668	1,802
—Indonesia	91	101	156	176	235	333	370	338
—Iran	182	126	78	63	60	87	109	111
—Japan	45	25	16	21	30	36	31	28
Australia	45	25	16	21	30	36	31	28
Europe	1,636	1,482	2,222	2,276	2,353	1,744	1,439	733
—Britain	45	75	110	204	188	141	99	71
—France	273	276	376	268	171	136	92	72
—Germany	136	402	360	317	385	203	137	77
—Italy	318	201	235	211	188	144	95	51
—Russia	91	201	282	655	813	654	240	142
North America	909	754	156	578	749	869	791	806
—Canada	91	50	16	28	43	59	51	41
—Mexico	364	251	78	70	77	154	164	166
—U.S.A.	227	201	31	423	556	538	454	458
South America	682	503	94	127	278	528	571	594
—Brazil	136	75	47	78	150	269	285	273

Russia (including Siberia, but not including Central Asia) is included in Europe.

Figures for Russia include the entire Russian Empire (1750, 1880) or Soviet Union (1940, 1975).

Figures for Germany include the Holy Roman Empire (1200, 1750), German Empire (1880), and Greater Germany (1940), and combine East and West Germany (1975, 2000, 2050).

Figures for Britain never include Ireland.

Figures for Canada, Mexico, the U.S.A., and Brazil include the entire 2006 continental territory of those nations during all years.

Talent by Trauma: Additional Talents, Decade by Decade

Nation	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Afghanistan	X	X	X	X	2	140	25
Algeria	X	X	25	15	X	X	10
Cambodia	X	3	2	2	231	91	1
China	637	1,249	1,522	1,149	582	400	400
Colombia	X	X	20	X	3	6	4
Congo	X	2	X	12	1	X	58
Ethiopia	25	X	X	X	36	37	10
France	X	52	4	X	X	X	X
Germany	X	921	3	2	2	2	X
Greece	X	52	X	X	X	X	X
India	1	55	X	2	1	16	6
Indonesia	X	42	4	62	10	5	5
Iran	X	X	X	1	3	83	2
Iraq	X	X	5	2	2	50	15
Japan	25	170	X	X	X	X	X
Korea	X	160	30	15	2	15	13
Nigeria	X	X	X	200	X	1	X
Poland	56	602	1	X	X	X	X
Romania	X	127	X	3	3	3	X
Rwanda	X	X	2	10	X	X	95
Spain	47	3	X	X	X	X	X
Sudan	X	X	10	50	10	40	40
Uganda	X	X	X	10	30	30	1
United Kingdom	X	26	X	X	X	X	X
U.S.A.	X	40	4	4	2	X	X
U.S.S.R.	1,585	4,370	760	2	2	3	10
Vietnam	1	10	35	225	181	2	X
Yugoslavia	1	172	2	X	X	X	29

This table needs a little more explication before you rush right out and use it.

Each column measures the decade ending in the given year.

"X" means fewer than 10,000 mass deaths in the given decade.

Numbers, as should be obvious, are best estimates rather than hard-and-fast figures. The death tolls given do not include famines, whether intentional (as in the Ukraine under Stalin or Ethiopia under Mengistu) or collateral (as with the famines triggered by the Somali civil wars or by WWII in India).

Epidemics are also missing; but deaths by starvation or disease in concentration camps and gulags are included, if only because separating out those data would have been impossible.

Since a fair number of extra deaths occur in subject regions, values for "China" include Tibet, "Ethiopia" includes Eritrea, and "Indonesia" includes East Timor. "Germany" includes both East and West Germany (and Greater Germany during World War II). "Korea" and "Vietnam" both include both North and South; especially in Vietnam, elucidating precisely who killed whom and why is more work than superhero worldbuilding normally merits.

- 1750 A.D. shows Europeans firmly planted in the Americas (along with around 20 Talented African slaves) and getting ready to subdue India. (World population is 12% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 1,200 Talents in it, roughly 275 of them European.)

- 1880 A.D. is the height of the British Empire, which contains around a quarter of the world's Talents. (World population is 23% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 2,300 Talents in it, 600 of them within the British Empire.)

- 1940 A.D. gives a Talent breakdown for World War II. (World population is 36% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 3,600 Talents in it, perhaps 400 of them in the Axis Powers.)

- 1975 A.D. is a good midpoint for the postwar era. (World population is 64% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 6,400 Talents in it, around 2,500 of them in Communist countries.)

- 2000 A.D. provides the per capita Talent breakdown for (roughly) the present day.

- 2050 A.D. shows U.N. population projections for the first half of the 21st century. (World population is 150% of year 2000 levels; a pro-rated world has 15,000 Talents in it, 687 of them American.)

Per Trauma

Some superhero cosmologies assume that parahuman Talent only emerges in times of grave personal trauma. Radioactive spider bites aside, there's nothing quite so traumatic as being murdered, whether by street thugs, your own government, or the armed forces of an enemy nation (or invading alien race). The following table shows the number of additional Talents likely to emerge in each decade in selected nations, assuming that of each 10,000 murders during war or genocide, one triggers a Talent instead. (For comparison's sake, there were about 24,000 murders every year in the United States in the 1990s, give or take; if Talent

only triggers during attempted murder, 24 new American Talents emerged in the 1990s—primarily African-American males, of course.)

You can still use the table as a more general guideline for the level of “background” trauma in the nations concerned, if you don't want to be pinned down to murders as the only trigger; it's a good bet that if 200,000 people are being slaughtered in a civil war, there are plenty of other traumas to go around, too. Possibly even radioactive spider bites, as labs get looted and security procedures generally go to pot.

Obviously, a world of trauma-driven Talents will look considerably different from traditional comic-book universes. In any given decade (except the 1940s), for example, the overwhelming majority of Talents are quite likely from China or the Third World. Does a Ugandan army of Talents conquer Africa in the 1970s? Which Ugandan army? If Talents spring up on both sides of a civil war, after all, that might cancel out any larger geopolitical impact. Along those lines, if an army of Talents invades some hapless nation, their own depredations might produce more Talents for the resistance!

This brings up another consideration: How any given distribution of Talents affects the world also depends on which side the Talents take. A patriotic Russian soldier who discovers his Talent in Afghanistan will be more likely to support the Communist Party and the Soviet regime than a dissident Russian prisoner who gains his Talent while being worked to death in Siberia. Which Talents take which sides will also alter the equation: Either the soldier or the prisoner might wind up a 13,000-Point Superman while the other only becomes a 5-Point Color Kid.

As You Like It

This section hasn't necessarily covered all the possibilities, but the basic outlines of your present world should be fairly clear by now. Feel free to tweak the

axes of design and the distribution and numbers of Talents until your world feels like the one you want to run games in. Once those basic parameters are set up, it's time to design the world to fit them.

Times Without Number

The number of potential alternate histories, even without throwing Talents into the mix, is essentially infinite. Whole shelves full of books this size could be written setting out the hinge points of history most suitable for superheroic tampering. Almost all of them appear in the Alternate History List at www.uchronia.net. This section will have to remain at a slightly higher level of generality.

Rather than attempt anything like universality, this section will run through the ages with an eye, primarily, for campaign design and high-powered adventure rather than the eddies and swirls of historical inertia.

We Who Are About to Fly Salute You

It's easy—in fact, it's very tempting—to run a really godlike campaign set in the ancient Bronze Age, featuring an invulnerable Achilles, a super-strong Heracles, a Hypercunning Odysseus, and so forth. Given the vagueness of both the original epics and modern historical recreations, it's barely worth the effort to develop an alternate history at all—the real 13th century B.C. (or thereabouts) has plenty of adventure and murky corners.

On the other hand, it's easy enough to tweak things to suit your own interests and aesthetics—Akhenaten makes a dandy mutant, for example, and the Assyrians (who invented ethnic cleansing, among other things) make awesome Nazis for a grim and gritty ancient world. Turning solar-obsessed Egyptian theocracy or elite Assyrian death squads up to four-color eleven should be the work of a moment.

However, the combination of distant change points and historical obscurity makes the ancient world an unlikely source for a “modern-day” alternate history. The major exception, of course, is a surviving Roman Empire—the Romans are familiar enough from televised epics and our own cultural debt that we can easily transpose gladiators and legions into terms both modern and parahuman. Perhaps something in the Roman imperial military cult—an invocation of Jupiter Facultus, perhaps, or an element of the Mithraic Mysteries—actually instilled Talent in the legions, or at least in a few “ultra-milites.” Although it's tempting to give the Romans overwhelming military Talents, the historical Romans had a pretty amazing military edge that wasn't enough, in the final analysis, to hold off the Fall.

Another fix for the Romans is a Hyperbrain (or a whole colony of them) at the Library and Museum of Alexandria who conveniently invent gunpowder, internal combustion, or whatever else you deem necessary to perpetuate the Caesars down to the modern day. (Of course, if the Industrial Revolution happens in the 2nd century A.D., the “modern day” may well be the computerized, sophisticated global Roman imperium of 406 A.D.) A similar set of twists can perpetuate Alexander's empire, or (with a few changes of scene) the Maurya in India, the Han in China, or the Achaemenid Persians.

Forward and Backward

Like the larger questions of design axes or population parameters, superheroic history is much easier to design backward. “I want a grotty, corrupt modern world ruled by the ramshackle Bonapartist Empire” gets you started immediately—some portion of the most powerful Talents have to be French (or Corsican), you can assume that there’s a stifling (but inefficient) registry for all Talents, the Blackness level likely hovers around 3 or so, and so forth.

You know that you have to weaken all the possible rivals to the Empire: the Russian Revolution had to fail (or be diverted into consuming itself completely), that the Americans have to be penned up behind the Mississippi, that the British are either occupied or impoverished, and so forth.

Beginning with “What if the first parahuman was one of Napoleon’s grognards?” only gets you to 1807 or so, as you have to decide if Wellington has His Majesty’s Talent Pool to draw from, or if the Russians can still rope-a-dope le Grand (et Talented) Armee in 1812. Once you know that you want Napoleon to win and conquer the world, you can work out why and how at your leisure, or (if your players aren’t likely to care) just hand-wave it and get on with the story.

With that said, designing forward is a lot of fun and usually creates a more organic feel for your world. Start with Napoleon—let’s say the first parahuman is a firestarter, Oriflamme, who burns up Nelson’s navy at Trafalgar. The war against England rolls back and forth, but there’s

still Russia to worry about on the French flank.

Who gets parahumans? Do British Hyperbrains invent ironclads—or submarines—to flank the fiery French? Does the war progress like *Godlike’s* World War Two—just a little longer, and just a little bit more colorful? Sixty years after 1815, that sets up a great Victorian Era of superheroes and steampunk Goldbergs—at roughly the same historical distance as our 21st century from the *Godlike* world of Der Flieger and the Indestructible Man. But it’s not the Bonapartist banana republic we were aiming for, is it?

Eventually, you’ll find yourself designing forward, with plenty of cause and effect riffing off an original change point—but aiming for that end goal all the time. Bonaparte got all the parahuman breaks; Oriflamme put out the fire in Moscow in 1812, and the British Hyperbrains were no match for the legions inspired by Murat’s Hypercommand.

But a reaction sets in, as the Bonapartes rein in their superpowered henchmen for fear of being overthrown themselves. Only the stupid and the easily led are commissioned as Imperial Talents, and sent to pointlessly destroy foreign enemies. This perverse incentive spreads throughout the Empire, but not quite fast enough to let Britain or Russia recover. No doubt there were great wars against the Americans—and perhaps in our current setting, the Empire is worried about a rumored “school for Talents” run by a crippled telepath in upstate New York.

And so forth.

Whosoever Can Lift This Castle Is Rightwise King of England

But eventually, the empires fell, and were replaced by tens or hundreds of tiny, squabbling kingdoms. Who sets up a kingdom in the Dark Ages? The strongest fighter, or the one with the best armor. Which is to say, in a Wild Talented world, a para-human. Even if the old empires of the classical era could muddle through with ruthless normal rulers and the inertia of civilization keeping the Talents in line, once the barbarians pour through (or fly over) the gates, all bets are off. Eventually, things shake out; the Talented divvy up the spoils and settle down to run things. King Arthur's knights, Charlemagne's paladins, the bogatyr of the Russian epics—all super-teams under one Hypercommand.

So, are Talents hereditary? If so, the “divine right of kings” becomes the “divine origin story of kings.” This kind of eugenic feudalism can be the excuse for a genuinely medieval-seeming society perpetuating itself for centuries down the ages. If you want a 21st century of jousts and castles—and the Inquisition burning mutants in the cathedral

squares of New Castile—this is how it happens. In our history, it was primarily people outside the rule of the feudal elite—townsmen, monks, and so forth—who created the economic and technical means to end feudalism. If the nobles are genuinely better than common folk, will that kind of spirit still exist?

This same question, of course, becomes relevant whenever and wherever Talents emerge. If Talented parents breed Talented children, the political implications become crystal clear—to both Talents and normals—in any society ruled by competition, be it medieval Scotland or modern California.

The Da Vinci Talent

The Renaissance is another prime opportunity for a Hyperbrain-driven early Industrial Revolution, complete with Sforza steam-tanks, Borgia radio propaganda, and Medici death-rays. The era is also full of brightly colorful characters getting into deadly fights for no good reason—as good a place as any to hold a superheroic campaign. A dominant Italy (whether unified under Pope Julius II or divided by dueling Hypercities) could have emerged



before 1494 (when the French invaded Italy and humiliated Florence) or as late as 1528 (when the Germans invaded Italy and accidentally destroyed Rome). Failing that, a suitable feel can be arranged with a Spanish victory over Elizabeth of England in 1588, and there's always the apocalypse of the Thirty Years' War—which even without Talents managed to kill a third of Germany and Bohemia from 1618 to 1648.

The Renaissance saw itself as a time of rediscovery—a rebirth of the ancient knowledges and arts. Could those include the ancient secrets of Talent? (You'll have to explain where the Talent went during the Dark Ages, but that's as simple as “the Earth's magnetic field passed through a phase change” or “there was a comet.”) Hyperartists like Leonardo and Alberti might discover ancient Goldberg Scientists in scrolls recovered from Byzantium—or powers inherent in the worship of the ancient gods. (Who, from the Mighty Thor to Mighty Isis, may have been suitably awesome Talents themselves.) Picture an alternate Renaissance in which the Church must encourage human resistance to an onslaught of pagan Talents—with the Dominicans as power nullifiers.

Another possibility is that our modern age of Talent is unlocked in 1999 (or whenever) by archaeologists or archivists deciphering or discovering Renaissance records—texts suppressed by just such a holy war. Depending on the level of “initiation” needed to become Talented, the default flavor of Talent may perforce be a quattrocento Italian swashbuckler rather than a pulp-era American masked wrestler.

Of course, in any century, if Hyperbrains can function as engineers, or if gadgedeers make permanent gadgets (whether newly invented or uncovered in a Florentine cellar), the campaign setting will become science fiction—if not at the GM's hand then as soon as the players get their grubby fingers on it. Best to know that going in.

The Revolution Begins in the Hyperbrain of the Philosopher

Beginning with the Dutch Revolt against Spain (1567–1648) and the English Civil War during the latter part of that era, notions of popular sovereignty (however attenuated by our modern standards) began to nuzzle their way into European thought. Could the people actually run their own affairs without aristocratic control? Any of these wars, revolutions, and uprisings—Holland, Britain, America, France, the 1848 revolts across Europe, and of course Russia—can take on a “people against Talents” tinge if you like. Or the emergence of Talents can symbolize (or be caused by) the birth of national spirit, the blood of massacred martyrs crying out for justice, or abstractions like the “air of liberty” or the “fire of freedom.” A revolution gone wrong (as most of them do, in one or another fashion) makes a great campaign setting, as the Talents on the winning side discover that the fight has just begun.

The Age of Revolution also ushers in a few design questions for the parahuman world. Most urgently, does Hypercommand pose any implications for democracy? Are all successful politicians, from Robespierre to FDR, just Hypercommand Talents after all? (The description of the power is a pretty eerie match for Napoleon, as it is.)

Or does the history of the world take a sudden lurch with a series of unknown, but very charismatic, figures launching amazingly successful recall elections, referenda, and coups d'état? The Hypercommand Candidate is a perfect “universal joint” for any alternate history you might care to build—does an amazingly charismatic Nikola Tesla (who keeps all his Hyperbrain mad science skills, naturally) take over Croatia in 1888 and build a proto-Latveria in the Victorian Balkans? Does an unknown senator become president in 1836 and send a vast expedition to colonize the Hollow Earth for America?

But the designer must either restrict Hypercommand to a few (*ipso facto*) major historical figures, resign himself to seeing an endless flurry of cast changes in the world's chancelleries, or come up with a semi-plausible way to restore Redness and avoid the whole problem. You might try this on for size: "Elect a Hypercommand senator? No, that doesn't work. Something about democratic psychology doesn't respond well to Hypercommand; perhaps over time, people start subconsciously resenting themselves for such adoration. Probably some Hyperbrain knows why—what's your Brains stat? 4? Oh, well."

The other big idea that comes out of the Age of Revolution is the notion of central planning—for economics, primarily, but that inevitably seems to lead to the rest of society. In our history, central planning has a considerably shakier track record than democracy, because modern economics theory has demonstrated fairly conclusively that there is no mathematical way for central planning to exceed the efficiency of the market in setting prices and directing goods to regions of scarcity. That is, central planning by human beings.

What Hyperbrains might be capable of is, quite literally, unknowable. A Hyperbrain (or, likely, a committee of Hyperbrains) might be just the thing to usher in the Marxist utopia in Russia in 1918, or Germany in 1848, or Britain in 1837 under the Chartists—or America in 1877, when the great railroad strike brought the United States as close as it ever got to social revolution. A campaign beginning as the Glorious Talentopia begins to fray at the edges—or as the jealous nations without Hyperbrains attempt their last, treacherous encircling attack—has great potential, wherever (or whenever) the lucky country might be.

Choose Your Own Confederacy

The American Civil War is the other white meat of alternate history. Will Shetterly's Captain Confederacy comics series only scratches the surface of the potential parahuman Confederate States of America. There are any number of reasonably plausible ways to get to an independent Confederacy, with or without Talents, although the Union started out with some fairly overwhelming advantages of manpower and industry.

British Intervention

The British prime minister, Lord Palmerston, felt both aristocratic sympathy for the South and cold, realpolitikal distaste for a powerful Union. In the wake of the Trent affair (November 8, 1861), when a Union ship intercepted and shanghaied two Confederate envoys to Britain, Palmerston almost maneuvered the North into a two-front war. Lincoln's willingness to back down, and the intervention of Prince Albert, averted a crisis. British intervention would have, at the very least, broken the Union blockade that strangled Confederate industry in its crib.

Military Defeat

Palmerston continued to seek out excuses for brinksmanship. A major Confederate victory at Antietam (September 17, 1862), where a single misdirected order prevented Lee from completely outmaneuvering Union General McClellan, might have allowed Palmerston to force an armistice under British supervision, that would have led to a negotiated independence for the South. Although Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (made politically possible only by Lee's stalemate at Antietam) aroused much sympathy in Parliament, and thus narrowed Palmerston's political options, a dramatic Confederate victory at Gettysburg

(July 1–3, 1863) might still have turned the tide. If Grant had been defeated before Vicksburg that May (admittedly highly unlikely—but barely possible with a more talented—or Talented—general than Pemberton or Joe Johnston), Lee might have had the necessary reinforcements to win at Gettysburg. Further, Lincoln could well have been forced to fire Grant and thus guarantee another grinding series of failures.

Political Collapse

Such a string of defeats could easily have led to the collapse of political will to fight in the North—a “Vietnam victory.” In 1864, the Democrats nominated failed General George McClellan, with a prominent Copperhead—an anti-war candidate—as his running mate. If McClellan had won the election—considered highly likely by seasoned political hands as late as September of 1864—the Confederacy could easily have wrangled an armistice and independence, again with British support.

Had Sherman’s march on Atlanta foundered at Kennesaw Mountain (June 27, 1864), or if Jubal Early’s mad raid on Washington (July 12, 1864) had panicked the government into retreat, or if Sterling Price’s invasion of Missouri (September 1, 1864) had managed to capture St. Louis and destabilize the Western theater, Northern opinion might well have shifted decisively toward the Democratic platform of appeasement and negotiation.

Likewise, there are any number of not immediately unlikely Confederacies that could have evolved over the next century and a half. Here are a few; mix and match, and add Talents to taste.



TODD '07

Southron Superpower

The most exciting (and hence most common) surviving Confederacy is one that expands into the Caribbean and Central America, usually via a conquered or satellitized Mexico, to become a great power in its own right. Southern industry would still have to come from somewhere—and the British would be very unlikely to fund a brand-new rival American power, having gone to some trouble to break up the old one.

However, adroit diplomacy, the demands of a war economy, and a “Confederate Bismarck” (or a few Hyperbrain engineers) could have created a Southern superstate from the materials at hand. In the present, a confident C.S.A. might still hold slaves, uncaring of European opinion. “Mutants” (Talents of nonhuman appearance) and black parahumans could be persecuted, while white Talents bask in the adulation and influence of a power-worshipping, violent society.

Championship Series

Much depends, of course, on what happens to the North. Does it turn inward, perhaps radicalizing during the 1877 rail strike—made far worse by a war-debt depression? Does it continue with McClellanite bluster and appeasement, allowing the South to rise unchallenged? Or does the Union roll up its sleeves, start building ironclads, and get ready for a rematch? A plausible history could see North and South square off every 25 or 30 years, like France and Germany, neither one gaining a decisive advantage and driving an arms race (or Talent contest) to dizzying heights as both nations turn harsh and militarized. Even a decisive Northern victory in 1918 or 1946 could lead to a long, grinding occupation, with Talented KKK “insurgents” behind every magnolia tree, and nests of the Soviet-supported “Confederate People’s Revolutionary Army” in the hills.

Our Poor American Cousins

Constant military expenditure, contrary to some opinions, does not enrich a nation. Two jealous, squabbling powers—both increasingly dependent on European capital—drift into poverty and inanition. Unless the U.S.A. or C.S.A. have major Talents, they have no real importance in global affairs—the equivalent, perhaps, of Argentina or Mexico. They become puppets of the Great Powers, spending their blood and dwindling treasure in proxy wars and foolish overseas commitments. A South in this world might have been forced by sanctimonious British opinion to “free” the slaves while keeping them in sharecropping apartheid. Race relations in the resentful, small-minded North might be no better.

Disunited States of America

Even in our history, President Lincoln faced one serious attempt to separate California from the Union, and a major conspiracy in the Midwest—to secede from the war, if not from the country. Meanwhile, Jefferson Davis faced recalcitrant state governors in Georgia and Mississippi, and at least one secession threat from Texas. Neither side would have been able to truly subdue the Plains Indians, or suppress a resurgent Mormon theocracy in Utah. (Canada, likewise, saw two serious secession crises over the next century.) A Confederate victory might well have led to a whole string of minor rebellions—including slave rebellions—shaking out eight or a dozen mini-republics and a morass of Indian Territories all across the continent. Any one of them could be a grinding tyranny, or a shining city on a hill, by the 21st century, as their ideologies and allegiances shift to counter each other. Perhaps in such a present, a team of Talents must join together to reunite a continent in the American Dream—or to launch a super-war of final conquest.

World War Wild

Running a *Godlike* game set during World War II is the default option. The *Godlike* core book has such a thick broth of that history that recapitulating the possible change points here would seem redundant. However, given that World War II is the single most popular nexus for alternate history in all fiction, it may be worth going over a few of its major, potentially war-altering decision points. For this list, I focus on events—unlike Stalingrad or D-Day—that a single powerful Talent, or a dedicated super-team, might shift.

June 11, 1940: The Siege of Malta

At the beginning of the Italian air offensive against Malta, the strategic British island fortress—the key to Axis logistics in North Africa—was defended by four biplanes and 40 anti-aircraft guns. This parlous state of affairs lasted until the end of August, more than enough time for a dedicated team of Talents to break the British defenses piecemeal, and (eventually) assure Rommel an uninterrupted stream of supplies.

August 29, 1940: Goering Abandons the Campaign Against British Radar

A few flying Talents could have turned the tide over Britain in either direction—or a team of infiltrators could have destroyed the British radar network and won Goering's battle for him. A German-occupied, or even neutralized, Britain would have left the decks clear for a successful Barbarossa.

December 7, 1941: Sneak Attack on Pearl Harbor

A single Talent flying high over Hawaii could have spotted the Japanese task force and warned Admiral Kimmel, with possible consequences ranging from averting the war entirely to forcing a Japanese negotiated surrender to an undamaged U.S. Pacific Fleet.

May 8, 1942: U.S.S. *Yorktown* Survives the Coral Sea

If the bomb that hit the U.S.S. *Yorktown* had gone twenty feet to the left, the carrier would have sunk. Not only would the Japanese have been able to take Port Moresby and threaten Australia, the *Yorktown's* planes would not have been present at Midway (June 5, 1942), where they spotted the Japanese carriers. FDR's "Europe First" policy depended on a stream of defeats for Japan—although Japanese victories would not have endangered America, they would have forced Roosevelt to delay major intervention in Europe.

March 14, 1943: The Bomb on Hitler's Plane Fails to Explode

A military conspiracy planned to assassinate Hitler on his way to Smolensk to inspect the front. The detonator mysteriously failed in the bomb planted on his plane. In the *Godlike* universe, Der Auge spotted the bomb precognitively—in any universe, Hitler is most vulnerable in midair, where his security is necessarily limited to a bare few Talents. On the same day as the failed sabotage, Manstein managed to salvage the German position in Russia—had the Wehrmacht been able to kill Hitler, they might have been able to end the war in a stalemate and keep control of much of the Ukraine.

October 25, 1944: Admiral Kurita Pulls Back at Leyte Gulf

This change point depends on a Talent persuading Japanese Vice-Admiral Kurita to mount a bold attack on the American landing zone at Leyte. Although he might well have been caught by Halsey's task force, he could have pressed the attack through the meager American defenses and risked his fleet to destroy the 200,000 American invaders, wallowing in landing craft. This would not have prevented the (eventual) liberation of the Philippines, but such staggering losses could easily have defeated FDR two weeks later on Election Day—with untold consequences for the developing Cold War.

The Modern Super-Age

In this final section, a few potential major historical twists from 1944 to the current century serve as jumping-off points for discussion of some key elements of superworlds. There are many, many more changes possible in the postwar world, although most of them riff on the themes below of assassination, escalation, or election.

August 1944: Roosevelt Drops Wallace

President Roosevelt's replacement of the pro-Soviet Wallace with the anti-Communist Truman could be seen as the first American victory in the Cold War. An America that that followed Wallace into appeasement and surrender of not just Eastern Europe but—to take only the historical examples—Finland, Iran, Greece, Turkey, the Philippines, Malaya, half of Japan, and all of Germany to Stalin, could have lost the Cold War.

A Communist America is perhaps still unlikely, but a game of American Talents facing a grim, totalitarian world from Mexico to Murmansk would have strong possibilities for world-changing action or gritty espionage adventure. Such an overwhelming Communist threat might also make a military coup d'état more likely.

The Soviets were never as strong again as they would have been against a disarmed America in the 1940s. However, if the dominoes had been allowed to topple freely in the 1950s or 1960s, a Communist Indonesia—or even India—would not have been impossible, with gruesome consequences for the balance of power.

Finally, the oil shock of the 1970s could have led to a genuine depression, and perhaps a losing American war in Iran. Thus relatively strengthened (and oil-rich), the Soviets might have been able to trigger a Marxist revolution in Venezuela or Mexico, forcing a lasting détente or at least extending the Cold War a generation or two into the 21st century.

January 27, 1947: The U.S. Abandons China

Fixing Chiang Kai-Shek's corrupt regime may be beyond the reach of any Talent. But bottling up the Communists in Manchuria to create a "Korean solution" to the problem would be within the powers of a sensible Nationalist Chinese leadership.

While Chiang liked to portray himself as a reliable U.S. ally, he was essentially out for what he could get for himself and China—a surviving Nationalist regime could have become a thorn in the American side quite rapidly. If a free (or free-ish) China followed the path of South Korea into democracy and industrial development, the geopolitical and economic stakes would have shifted dramatically. This kind of large-scale change is up to the GM to decide on and enforce—Maoist China eventually became a third superpower, and even embraced some elements of capitalism in our history. A more-capitalist, less-totalitarian China might be a new Brazil, a global basket case like Argentina, or a Japan with ten times the population and power.

Another "alternate great power" is France, which tried to pursue its own diplomatic line under de Gaulle. If a different general—say, Salan in Algeria—had seized power, France might have been even more determined to chart a third way. Such a maverick France might become a military dictatorship enforcing its empire in Africa, or a glorious technocratic paradise claiming the high ground in space.

India, likewise, spent the first 40 years of its independence toeing a vaguely pro-Soviet line and keeping its economy isolated from the larger world—a more pro-American, capitalist India would easily have become a great power during the 1980s.

If the pragmatic Hugh Gaitskell hadn't died in 1963, perhaps he (and not technocratic socialist Harold Wilson) would have led the Labour Party to victory, avoiding Britain's "industrial disease" and leading the U.K. to dominance in the electronic age.

Slightly less plausibly, Brazil could have launched a biotech revolution, Konrad Adenauer might have

Four-Color Fascism

The “supers in a fascist nation” campaign draws on comics material from *V for Vendetta* to *Squadron Supreme*. From images of government Talents ruthlessly enforcing conformity to brave mutants battling the secret police from subterranean headquarters, there are endless possibilities for roleplaying fun. (In a Black 3 setting, characters might even side with the government, on the grounds that the opposition is worse!) So how can we make America go fascist for our gaming enjoyment?

After the War: Germany and Italy emerged from World War I with grudges against the victorious Allies and devastated economies that could not employ the millions of ex-soldiers. Germany elected Hitler, who then used non-democratic means to consolidate Nazi power; in Italy, Mussolini’s party exacerbated the chaos until the king invited him to form a government. In *V for Vendetta*, Britain goes fascist in the environmental chaos following a nuclear war—one that the pacifist former government ironically avoided.

An America in the aftermath of even an unsuccessful alien invasion might have the same problems—resentment of other countries that didn’t fight the invaders, vaporized cities and economic chaos, and plenty of aggressive, angry Talents who feel betrayed by their government. Without invoking aliens, a defeated Union could similarly slide into dictatorship under, say, Benjamin Butler.

The Sword of the State: By contrast, in some nations the elected government proves too radical (or incompetent) for large parts of the population, sparking national unrest. As the only trusted national institution, the military then takes power, either in a sudden coup as in Chile in 1973, or after a lengthy civil war as in Spain in 1936. (In some cases, as in Turkey in 1960 or France in 1958, the military ratifies its leadership by popular vote, or installs a hopefully

more stable democratic system and surrenders power.)

Had FDR been more ideological or less gifted, an American military coup (helped along by mind-controlling Talents behind the scenes?) could have seized power in the 1930s. In our history, Marine General Smedley Butler testified that a cabal of business magnates approached him to lead just such a coup in 1933.

Save Us From Them: Often, the population of a country has more fears of a dangerous group than it does of a would-be dictator. Many people saw Mussolini and Hitler as the only leaders who could save them from Communist tyranny, for example. This requires both a credible threat—Communism was expansionist and tyrannical, after all, and Communist rioters had seized power in a few German towns—and a weak response from the legitimate government. An aggressive Weimar Republic, that crushed all riots—Right or Left—impartially and built up German arms against Russia, could never have fallen to Hitler. In a Red 3 or lighter universe, Magneto’s agenda of mutant revolution and atrocities could easily inspire a fascist anti-mutant (though not necessarily anti-Talent) government in America.

Seven Days In May: In Japan, the Kodoha faction of the military essentially launched its own private war in China in 1931, and slowly forced the government to yield more and more power in the name of waging the war. Such a strategy requires an active ideological movement within the military, a convenient war, and a population and government unwilling to rock the boat. In Japan, the weak constitution made it easy to dodge responsibility for reining in the army—in the U.S., with its strong tradition of civilian control, the war would have to escalate to a state of emergency too fast for Congress or the President to intervene. A nuclear crisis that escalated the Cold War could have worked, or another convenient alien invasion.

traded German neutrality for unification and begun the European divorce from America in 1952, or Canada could have remained a major military power. Of course, if any nation holds the preponderance of high-powered Talents, it will become a global force to be reckoned with whether it's a sunny democracy like Costa Rica or a cradle of misery like Burma.

February 16, 1951: The Huemul Project

In 1948, the Austrian expatriate Ronald Richter convinced Argentine President Juan Perón to fund the construction of an experimental nuclear fusion reactor on Huemul Island in Argentina. His design used deuterium plasma excited by high-energy particle shock waves; on February 16, 1951, Richter announced a successful controlled fusion reaction. Orthodox scientists disagreed, and he refused to publish his secretive experimental data; Perón closed down the Huemul Project in 1952. A similar “false alarm” fusion reaction was achieved by the British ZETA project in 1954, and by the Farnsworth-Hirsch Fusor project at ITT in 1967 (based on a 1930s design by the inventor of television, Philo T. Farnsworth). A slightly different false alarm was the “cold fusion” fiasco of Pons and Fleischmann in 1989. At Oak Ridge National Laboratory in 2002, there were reports (so far not clearly reproduced) of experimental “acoustic cavitation” fusion created by sonoluminescence.

Nuclear fusion is the paradigmatic Thing to Invent and Change the World, and breaking the fusion barrier should be well within the capacity of a Hyperbrain. The invention of practical, cheap, clean fusion would revolutionize industry, economics (the deflationary effect of energy costs dropping would be substantial, even with the need to invest in new power plants) and geopolitics. Fusion power requires not oil or uranium but deuterium, available from seawater. Although still useful for jet fuel and plastics, petroleum would no longer be the lifeblood of the world economy. Within a

decade of commercial fusion coming on line, the Middle East would completely collapse as oil prices plummeted. Depending on the specific country, the superpowers might simply avert their eyes (as with the ongoing massacres, coups, and warfare in African countries without strategic mineral reserves) or choose up sides for desultory proxy wars. Without oil-fueled wealth to extort from terrified sheiks, international Islamist terrorism would have to fall back on local robberies and foreign sympathizers—a backwater version of the IRA.

Summer 1952: How Do We Beat Ike?

In the 1952 political season, everyone knew that Dwight Eisenhower would be the next U.S. president. The only question was which party he would choose to lead to victory. He announced for the Republican nomination and the Democrats had no silver bullet. However, if we postulate a powerful, patriotic, vigorous, charismatic Talent—Superman, Captain America, or an even more Indestructible Man—willing to take the nomination, the Democrats have an option.

Here is the GM's chance to play a wild card. A Talented war hero (perhaps the one who drove off the alien invaders) elected president can be anything the GM wishes, from a hapless do-gooder manipulated by powerful bosses to a Hitler wannabe to a Soviet agent to the second coming of George Washington. Anything you want, from true racial equality to a Mars colony to an unwinnable war in Mexico, can be the legacy of “President Hyperman.” A Talented president might usher in a whole series of Talented candidates (with Hypercommand always a potential further wrinkle) and presidents—Talents might be as common in American electoral politics as lawyers. Or, if he's a disaster, it might harm the image of Talents everywhere—if President Hyperman can't rescue the hostages from Iran, why should we trust a parahuman to fight crime?

October 1962: The Cuban Missile Crisis

In a cosmology where radiation and near-death experiences awaken Talents, a nuclear war can be just the thing to charge up a setting. (Even nuclear tests can awaken giant monsters, if it's a high enough Blue game.) The U.S. threatened or considered nuclear attacks numerous times during the Cold War, beginning with Truman's apocryphal threat to "drop one down the Kremlin chimney" if Stalin didn't back off in Finland. Other possible flashpoints range from Indochina in 1954 (when the French requested nuclear aid at Dienbienphu) to President Nixon's global DEFCON 3 alert during the Yom Kippur War.

The Cuban Missile Crisis is the most famous example of a near-brush with nuclear terror, although ironically a war in 1962 would have been relatively survivable (as such things go), since the arsenals of both powers were much smaller than they would become in the era of Mutually Assured Destruction. (The U.S. would also have "won" the exchange handily, since Kennedy's "missile gap" didn't actually exist.)

Other possible nuclear wars include the 1969, 1978, and 1979 Sino-Soviet flareups—such a nuclear war leaves the U.S. a global superpower by default, while presenting lots of huge crises for high-powered Talents as Asia slides into utter chaos.

The worst nuclear war we didn't actually have occurred twice in 1983, during a period of intense Soviet paranoia and Andropov's failing health. A computer glitch almost led to a Soviet first strike on September 26; a NATO nuclear-command training exercise called ABLE ARCHER 83 scared the Soviets into readying their missiles in Czechoslovakia and the Baltics.

One twitchy general, or a Talent crossing into Soviet airspace at the wrong time, could have created the mother of all post-holocaust super-settings.

November 22, 1963: John F. Kennedy Assassinated

An assassination is the single easiest and most plausible event to change with even one Talent in the right place. (The same is true of attempted assassinations, from Fidel Castro to Ronald Reagan.) This is the slightly less wide-open version of the "President Hyperman" scenario—while an historical Talent can be pretty much anything you want, an assassinated leader is more commonly a known element.

Martin Luther King's assassination (April 4, 1968) almost certainly worsened U.S. race relations, and also removed an increasingly influential American advocate of socialism and accommodation to the Soviets. A surviving MLK is unlikely to have endorsed libertarian mores, or called for a crusade against Iran, or whatever other arbitrary decision the GM would like to see in his world.

The Kennedys remain more of a blank slate—would JFK have ended, or escalated, the Vietnam War? Would he have even won a second term?

Would Robert F. Kennedy (June 5, 1968) have continued his brother's legacy of tax cuts, anti-communism and wiretapping of subversives to become a Democratic Reagan? Or would he have drifted left with his party and provided progressive politics in America with a huge institutional boost? (In either case, a surviving RFK would likely have done much to heal racial tensions.)

Outside America, similar questions attend the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (January 30, 1948) on the verge of Indian independence, the dictator Park Chung-Hee in South Korea (October 26, 1979), and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Israel (November 4, 1995).

In some games, a thwarted assassination could lead to the exposure of the Conspiracy, and an open struggle against Their agenda.

September 11, 2001: The New Pearl Harbor

Playing a game set in a world with an altered September 11, 2001 may be impossible for some. The tragedy is too recent for glib additions of caped vigilantes, and the political issues surrounding the War on Terror remain raw. If your group is all on the same page about the event and its implications, of course, feel free to alter it or otherwise use it as campaign fodder. Herewith, however, a few general observations.

- The technical means for the 9/11 attacks were in place by the 1940s, or even earlier—the use of passenger planes as suicide firebombs could have begun with the IRA, the Tamil Tigers, the PLO, or the Legion of Doom.

- The U.S. government's response to the attacks (and those of other governments) may be taken as a hard-core “high realism” model of a likely response to some outrage by a supervillain, especially one that kills thousands of Americans. A supervillain seeking sanctuary in another country—whether one he runs, like Genosha or Latveria, or a convenient refuge like Afghanistan or Corto Maltese—will be hunted down by the U.S. military, and by as many Talents as the military can recruit and command. He may, however, still escape the destruction of his underground headquarters. If you don't see the body. . . .

- Regardless of your personal opinion of the USA Patriot Act, restrictive acts like it have been the invariable response by the U.S. government—from Jefferson to Lincoln to Wilson to FDR to LBJ—to wartime emergencies from 1798 onward. An alien invasion or similar crisis would realistically create a similar legal and cultural climate—especially if the aliens were shapeshifters or otherwise capable of blending into the human population.

Politics

Any decision you make about world design can be read as a political decision. Your players probably know you well enough to be able to predict your predictions. That's why it's wise to know your assumptions and consider changing them up. A rollicking game of “City of the Dreadful Nixon” or “President Gore's Most Excellent Utopia” can be fun if everybody agrees with your assumptions, but that won't always be the case. Here are a couple of pitfalls to avoid if your players aren't ideologically uniform.

First, don't use your world as a soap box. L. Neil Smith's novel *The Probability Broach* and its sequels are entertaining adventures—when they aren't lecturing the reader about the inherent virtue and inevitable triumph of libertarian politics. The world not only seems unrealistic to those without Smith's faith in the power of individualistic anarchism, it commits the worse sin of being predictable whenever its history interacts with that power. Players will forgive lapses in realism more often than they will lapses of interest.

Don't assume that a politically-motivated prediction has anything to do with a likely result. I'll pick on the left this time: Many intelligent and well-respected people firmly believed that if Ronald Reagan became president, he would plunge America into a nuclear war. In fact he was the first president to negotiate nuclear arms reductions. One suspects that, LBJ campaign ads to the contrary, Barry Goldwater would also have somehow restrained his mad lusts for atomic decimation had he been elected in 1964. Feel free to select results for drama—nuclear war in 1965 over Vietnam would make a fascinating alternate history—but don't pretend that it's a neutral decision.

Chapter 12: A World Gone Mad

“You tell me what’s worse: a world at war dreaming of peace, or a world at peace dreaming of war?” *Hyperbrain Eli Watson, May 22, 1951, commenting on the Cold War in a Life magazine interview.*

Your Game, Your World

This chapter is an overview of the world that first appeared in the roleplaying game *Godlike*, an alternate timeline where superhuman Talents appear beginning in 1936 and battle each other amid the devastation of World War II. *Godlike: Superhero Roleplaying in a World on Fire, 1936 to 1946* details the war, along with a complete game system for

creating and playing Talents fighting to free the world from Axis tyranny.

“A World Gone Mad” presents a condensed version of the timeline of *Godlike* and the future of the post-war world. Beginning with the escalation of the Soviet-American conflict and the arrival of Wild Talents—superhumans whose power transcend all the limitations of their forebears—“A World Gone Mad” outlines a civilization that has truly gone beyond the pale. But this is only one possible world. Indeed, it’s only one possible future for the world of *Godlike*.

Use the ideas and rules throughout *Wild Talents* to create exactly the game world that you want.



What is a Talent?

Talents, as they first appear in World War II, are amazing abilities that allow human beings to do the impossible. These powers do not represent some amazing physical ability, but the power of the mind to rewrite reality itself, allowing nearly anything to happen, no matter how outlandish it might seem. “Talent” quickly came to refer as well to the people who had these powers.

First appearing in 1936, Talents could innately sense and resist each other’s abilities. Talents could not permanently alter physical reality, but only change it for short periods before it reverted to its former state. And some powers were beyond the capacity of even the most powerful Talents. Telepathy, time travel, true super-science—although some Talent powers came close, none could breach these limits.

During the war, Talents fought on every side of the conflict. Due to the limitations of their powers, they very effectively cancelled each other out. The nature of Talent powers limited their impact on the world.

The Term ‘Talent’

The term “Talent” is widely used to describe anyone with paranormal abilities, but in some countries and cultures parahumans are called by other names. French superhumans are often called *Surhommes* (“Super Men.”) British superhumans in World War II were sometimes called “The Few,” in reference to Winston Churchill’s famous speech about the pilots and Talents of the Battle of Britain: “Rarely has so much been owed by so many to so few.”

Indian superhumans are called *Vidhyaharas* (“Learned Ones”), Jewish superhumans *Nephilim* and Russian superhumans *Супер Человек*. In the Axis, German superhumans were *Übermenschen* (“Over-Men” or “Super-Men”), while Japanese su-

perhumans were called *Gaki* (“Hungry Ghosts”). Wartime Italian superhumans were called *Custodes* (“Guardians”).

New York Times reporter Stephen J. Whelan introduced the term “Talent” to the public on February 14, 1940. Whelan was writing about the growing population of parahumans in the world, and during his studies read a 1932 book called *Wild Talents*, by Charles Fort. This book catalogued strange and unusual occurrences, including psychic phenomena and unusual medical conditions. Fort implied that what we call the “supernatural” might actually be the manifestation of some unknown “wild talent” that humanity naturally possesses. Whelan took Fort’s writing to heart in his February 14 article:

“If the powers reflected in Fort’s book are called ‘Wild Talents,’ I suppose what we are seeing now could be called ‘Talents.’ Perhaps this is not an example of a whole new array of human capabilities, but simply the honing of some inherent and secret human skill which is just now coming to light.”

The public took to his shortening of Fort’s phrase, and soon the word was inseparable from the phenomenon itself.

Still, before its introduction many phrases were used to describe the Talent condition. Talents were called superhumans, parahumans or supermen. Sometimes these old phrases are still used. The scientific community still tends to call them parahumans, and some newspapers still print headlines using the word “super” to drum up sales.

To the public, however, the amazing people who can do the impossible will always be “Talents.”



The Super-Age (1936 to 1946)

“Godlike in their abilities, let us hope this new breed of man will carry the burden of a suffering world to our ultimate and unwavering goal—freedom for all the people of the Earth.” *Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 10, 1941, on the announcement of America’s first Talent, the Indestructible Man.*

Since the appearance of Der Flieger, the German “Flying Man,” in June 1936, the world has struggled to understand the concept of Talents. The very nature of the phenomenon—Talents could detect and cancel each other’s powers—kept it from enveloping the whole world. Instead, Talents fought and died just like their normal compatriots, only sometimes changing history.

A Brief Timeline of World War II

This chapter touches on some of the most important events of the war in the world of Wild Talents. See *Godlike* for a more comprehensive history.

June 8, 1936—Konrad Rahn (called Der Flieger, “the Airman”) flies, under his own power, into the Olympic Stadium to light the ceremonial torch. The world is left in awe. Hitler proclaims Rahn “the first of the newly-reborn Aryan race.” The Airman flies from the stadium faster than the speed of sound.

October 10, 1938—Briety Krizova (called Pevnost, “the Fortress”) escapes the Gestapo in Prague by transporting himself 644 miles to a rail stop in England. His power can link any two doorways through which he has previously passed. He joins the Czech government-in-exile and throws his hat in with the British.

September 11, 1939—Colonel Piotr Ciowski (called Cien, “the Shadow”) manifests parahuman

ability in the streets of Krakow while defending the city from the Germans. Ciowski can telekinetically manipulate objects touched by his shadow. He devastates a German battalion and escapes over the border into Romania. Two weeks later he makes it to England.

December 19, 1939—A supernatural killer begins to pick his way through the occupying Soviet forces in Finland. Called Viljo, “Resolute Protector,” by the locals, the parahuman can dodge bullets, survive arctic conditions without shelter and disappear into the snow in a heartbeat.

February 14, 1940—*New York Times* reporter Stephen J. Whelan coins the term “Talent” in the last of his series of articles on the world-wide obsession with the supermen. Soon, even in foreign countries the term “Talent” is adopted to describe parahumanity.

April 11, 1940—Jan Dinesen, a resistance fighter in Denmark, discovers his Talent power while being shot at by a firing squad. No matter how carefully the Germans aim, every bullet misses the young Dane. The Germans label him Vogel, “the

Bird,” and the young Talent escapes to continue the fight against the Nazis.

April 12, 1940—A young Norwegian boy manifests Talent abilities while his town is under attack by German forces. Wielding a stage-prop spear, the 13-year-old defeats a tank battalion, gathers resistance fighters and transports himself to England with his newfound powers. He calls himself Aesgir, the Spear of the Gods.

May 11, 1940—The Dutch Talent Daegraad (“Dawn”) begins his fight against German occupation. Daegraad, who can control and project light and darkness, leads a resistance movement against the Nazis but refuses offers by British intelligence for assistance.

May 12, 1940—Vedel (“the Wolf”) begins his fight against the Nazis in Belgium. Able to eliminate any threat with superhuman speed and strength while in an unconscious fugue, the Belgian communist takes to the hills and gathers a cabal of conspirators to overthrow the Nazi-friendly government in Brussels.

May 14, 1940—L’Invocateur (“the Summoner”) strikes for the first time, killing several Ger-



man officers in occupied France. Capable of turning invisible when his eyes are closed, this French Surhomme wreaks havoc on the power structure of the German army in France, murdering dozens of German officers and Vichy officials.

May 19, 1940—Feuerzauber (“Fire Magic”), the second Nazi Übermensch, appears in the fighting in eastern France. Leutnant Ernst Karsten is immune to kinetic attack, and vents the proportionate amount of energy out of his body as a wave of heat. He is rushed back to Berlin for celebration and an audience with Hitler. The following week, two new German Talents are discovered.

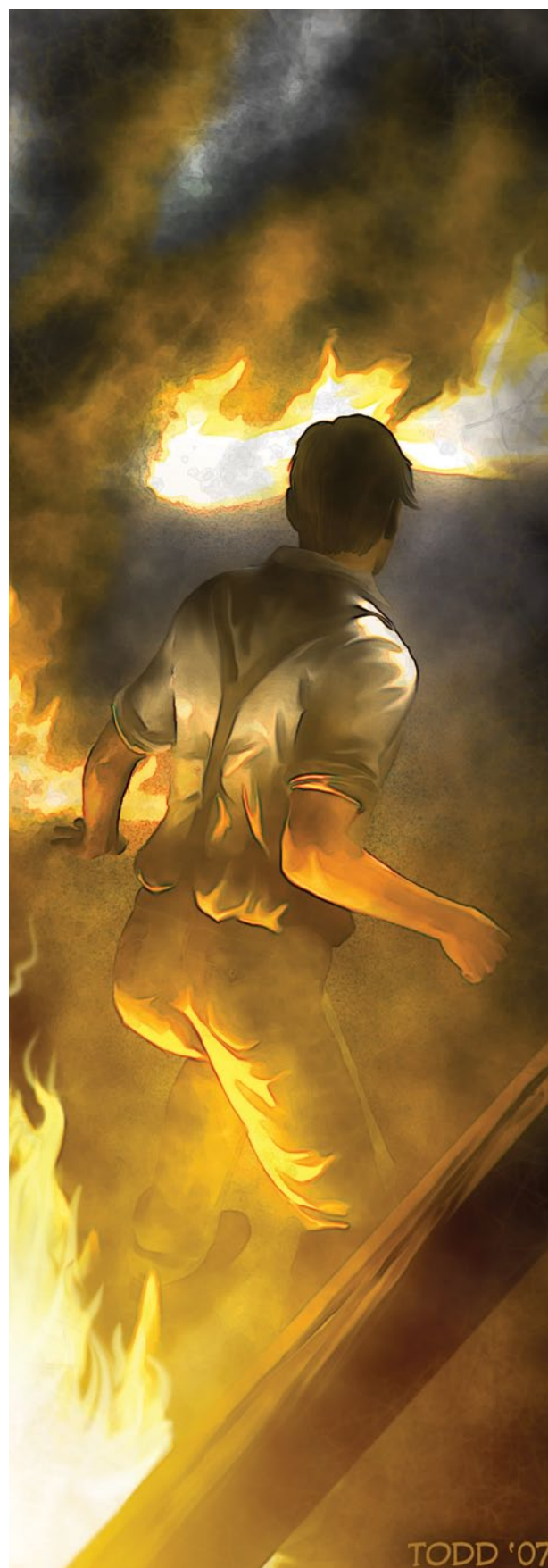
May 22, 1940—Zhao Zheng, the Ghost of Yungping, is discovered in occupied China. The youth avoids execution by Japanese police by becoming wholly immaterial. He flees to the countryside to avoid capture.

June 5, 1940—Jumping Johnny, Lt. Jonathan Lear, becomes England’s first native Talent during the Dunkirk evacuation when he jumps the English Channel in a single 27-mile leap.

June 21, 1940—Lithuanian Talent Salet Micewiski (known as Bellerophon) leads a brief revolt against occupying Soviet forces with his superhuman powers. Four days later Micewiski and his followers are destroyed by elements of the Soviet Eighth Army.

June 30, 1940—Soviet Special Directive One is formed by order of supreme leader Josef Stalin, for the purpose of creating a Soviet super-man through psychological manipulation of political prisoners. Thousands perish before their first success.

August 30, 1940—Hitler declares August “the month of the super-man,” celebrating the discovery of nearly 30 Übermenschen in German forces since the first of the month. More and more reports of German parahuman manifestations come in daily from all points of the growing Reich.



TODD '07

September 3, 1940—Twelve British Talents appear during the bombing of London. As the German attacks intensify, more British Talents appear.

October 10, 1940—The first known female Talent manifests in Bucharest, Romania. Antonina Ilescu kills 40 people and levels nearly a block of buildings with her ultrasonic screams. The Germans label her Die Hexe (“the Witch”) and dispatch teams to hunt her in the wilderness.

November 5, 1940—Charles Lindbergh, swayed by Nazi propaganda and the appearance of the Übermenschen, leaves the United States to live in Germany.

November 10, 1940—The German Talent population tops 400.

February 12, 1941—German Afrika Korps, under the command of Gen. Erwin Rommel, arrives in Tunisia along with 14 Übermenschen to turn the tide of the war against the British.

March 5, 1941—Jaeger (“the Hunter”) becomes the first German Übermensch casualty in the war when British Flight Lieutenant Jeffrey Rotman blows him out of the air over the Libyan plateau.

March 9, 1941—Prime Minister Winston Churchill dispatches 11 British Talents to Alexandria, Egypt, to counter the Germans’ movement of Übermenschen to North Africa.

March 16, 1941—British forces push into Ethiopia and capture significant territory from the occupying Italian Forces. They are assisted by the largest cell of resistance in the country, led by the Ethiopian Talent Zindel—a superhuman who transforms his enemies into salt effigies.

March 21, 1941—Under orders from Josef Stalin, a complex trap set for the Finnish Talent Viljo pays off when he attempts to free political prisoners near his home of Idel, Finland. The entire camp is shelled by Russian artillery as the Talent attacks, killing him and several dozen Russian soldiers.

March 29, 1941—The U.S. and British governments strike a secret accord code-named BLUE. In

exchange for valuable equipment and supplies for the war against Germany, England agrees to share its intelligence on the Talent phenomenon.

March 30, 1941—German and British Talents tangle in North Africa. Two British Talents are killed and two gravely wounded, while one German Übermensch is killed. Each side retreats, unable to mount an offensive to take advantage of the chance encounter.

April 9, 1941—Stasio, the first known Yugoslavian Talent, manifests fighting the German push towards Neretva. He renders nearly the entire XL Panzer Corps temporarily insane with his mind-bending illusions and leads his men to safety in the mountains.

April 10, 1941—The Pythia Oracles of the mythological Greek god Apollo reappear in the mountains of Greece as the Germans invade. Despite the chaos, thousands of Greeks flock to the site near Mount Olympus to see them.

May 10, 1941—A devastating bomber raid on London kills nearly 2,000 people, and 94 Talents manifest amid the rubble. Britain is now second only to Germany in Talents.

May 13, 1941—While clearing out the last pockets of Italian occupation in his country, the Ethiopian Talent Zindel dies when he steps on a land mine. British commandos spirit his body to London for dissection.

May 15, 1941—Twenty-one British Talents save the poorly-planned Operation Brevity by disrupting the German line, allowing nearly 80% of the British forces to escape encirclement. It is the first truly successful use of Talents in conventional combat.

June 9, 1941—A Talent-created jetpack is demonstrated at the Berlin air show to a crowd of nearly 60,000 people. The small metal backpack fails when the pilot is nearly one hundred feet up, killing him when he hits the ground. It is later discovered that the creator of the Düsenpack is a Talent

who can instill his powers into machines, allowing them to perform impossible actions—but only as long as he can see them. Later this power is labeled “Goldberg science.”

June 15, 1941—Four British Talents tour America in support of the Lend-Lease Act. Arthur Smith (a pyrokinetic), Templeton Ruperelia (a flier called “Bolt”), Grant Kearney (called “Pop,” who can control air pressure) and Lloyd Feit (a super-strong “98-pound weakling” called “Bulldog”) become national heroes.

June 19, 1941—Hitler gives authority to the SS to take command of all German Übermenschen. Himmler, leader of the SS, forms SS Überkommandogruppen (“SS Super-Commando Groups”).

June 22, 1941—After nearly a year of experimentation, Soviet Special Directive One has its first success. The Talent monstrosity Baba Yaga is created through systematic torture. Five days later the madman, transforming into a grotesque house on legs 40 feet high, destroys the Directive One facility and escapes into the wilds of Russia as the Germans invade.

July 19, 1941—After weeks of careful study, the body of the Ethiopian Talent Zindel is determined to be completely human. British scientists can find no anatomical reason behind the Talent phenomena.

August 4, 1941—Pevnost teleports hundreds of British and Czech commandos into Prague, where they capture the city from the Nazis for four days. Impromptu trials convict both SS Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich and President Josef Tiso of crimes against the Czech people, and they are executed in front of cheering crowds before the Allies retreat back to England through Pevnost’s doorways.

August 9, 1941—Bulldog is assigned as a permanent “attaché” to President Roosevelt at the British-American Newfoundland meeting. Prime Minister Churchill is concerned that Talent assassins

may threaten the President’s life. Bulldog never strays more than a few feet from the President for more than four years.

October 31, 1941—The U.S. destroyer *Reuben James*, DD-245, is sunk on convoy duty in the Atlantic, torpedoed by a German U-boat. The attack kills all aboard except for one man, who survives to become America’s first Talent. Ensign Lawrence Moreland is dubbed the “Indestructible Man.” His Talent renders him immune to any attack, as long as he knows it’s coming.

November 10, 1941—President Roosevelt announces the sinking of the *Reuben James* and the discovery of the Indestructible Man on national radio. Public response is enormous.

November 21, 1941—Rushed newsreels of the Indestructible Man demonstrating his amazing abilities debut in New York and Los Angeles. Lines for the 30-minute newsreels soon stretch city blocks.

December 1, 1941—Waking from a dream in which the USS *Arizona* was destroyed in a blaze of fire, Rear Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, commander of the craft, orders the forward belly hold emptied of explosives.

December 7, 1941—During the startling sneak attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Navy, the USS *Arizona* sustains two serious hits, but due to the lack of explosives in the forward belly it does not sink.

December 13, 1941—Experienced British Talents hold off a German Übermensch force that outnumbers them nearly ten to one. The British force “Larsen’s Folly” suffers serious casualties but kills 29 Übermenschen, forcing the German force to retreat.

December 20, 1941—First Lieutenant Robert Young becomes America’s second Talent. Young, a pilot with the American Volunteer Group in China (the “Flying Tigers”), discovers his ability to control gravity when his parachute fails. Young



continues the fight in China against the Japanese, inflicting heavy losses on their air force by making their aircraft far too heavy to fly.

December 22, 1941—Santiago Corzon, a Filipino soldier, discovers his Talent ability during the Japanese invasion of Luzon. He transforms into a 26-foot dragon and destroys an entire Japanese battalion before retreating to the interior of the island to continue the fight.

December 29, 1941—British scientists submit a report to Prime Minister Churchill confirming that the number of known British Talents has topped 750.

December 30, 1941—The first rumors of a powerful new Jewish Nephilim spread through occupied Europe. Called Sheol, this superhuman can apparently help Jews escape from Europe. Not many know the truth: Sheol, a young girl, can only copy minds, which live on inside her. Near the end of the war almost a million Jews reside in her overcrowded mind.

January 1, 1942—An unknown assassin attempts to gain entry to the White House in parahuman disguise during the Atlantic Charter meeting, but is detected by the British Talents Bulldog and the Shade. The Shade tackles the assassin as the man activates a large bomb in the briefcase and, activating his Talent, drags the assassin and the bomb out of phase with the physical world. The bomb detonates in silence, instantly killing the Shade and the assassin, but leaving everyone else, including the president and the prime minister, unharmed. The Atlantic Charter meeting continues.

January 10, 1942—The USS *Saratoga* is torpedoed off the coast of Hawaii by a Japanese submarine, killing five crewmen and granting one, Walter “Ironclad” Kelly, Talent abilities. Kelly is returned to the United States under great secrecy.

January 21, 1942—Three German Übermenschen are captured in Libya and returned to England as prisoners of war.

January 26, 1942—American troops, including Lawrence “Indestructible Man” Moreland, are moved to England in support of the growing joint effort against the Axis.

March 12, 1942—To prevent infighting within the Armed Forces of the United States over the growing Talent population, President Roosevelt forms the Talent Operations Command. This committee reviews and assigns Talents to various branches of the military depending on ability.

April 19, 1942—The Japanese gain their first known Talent, First Lieutenant Hoshi “Star” Katamura. The youth teleports from his aircraft moments before it smashes into the deck of the carrier *Shoho*. His protective teleportation makes him the ultimate kamikaze pilot, able to fly suicide missions over and over again.

July 9, 1942—In his most daring act to date, the French Talent L’Invocateur murders four SS men in Le Petit Casino in Paris, leaving a hand of aces and eights—the dead man’s hand—on the table in front of the corpses.

July 22, 1942—FBI director J. Edgar Hoover is assigned 12 “Duds”—Talents who have no obviously useful abilities—to assist the FBI in rooting out foreign super-men.

July 31, 1942—The Wisconsin Supreme court decides *Wisconsin vs. Taft*, the first case filed against an American Talent for the use of his powers. The court decreed that Louis Taft disrupted the public peace by levitating to work. So-called “Taft” laws begin to spring up all over the U.S. restricting the use of dangerous Talent abilities in public places without a permit.

August 9, 1942—Ensign Franklin “Super Swabby” Wolensky discovers his Talent ability when his ship is destroyed by Japanese fire off the coast of Guadalcanal. Wolensky uses his “Wolen-

sky Bubbles”—force fields of immense power—to assist the U.S. Marines’ fight on Guadalcanal.

August 13, 1942—Talent Operation Group 1 (TOG 1), a commando team of American Talents, assaults Zeebrugge, Belgium. At the cost of a single casualty, the commandos destroy millions of dollars worth of equipment and escape back to England.

August 19, 1942—During a disastrous raid on Dieppe, France, a Canadian tank commander, Maj. Graham Tunney, manifests as a super-powerful “mad” Talent (much like the Russian Baba Yaga). Called “The Ghost of the Fourteenth,” Tunney continues on a campaign to kill every German who was present on the beach during the landings. After 1945, when he kills the last Übermensch who was present at Dieppe, Tunney is never seen again.

January 12, 1943—On the Moscow front, the world’s first Hyperbrain is discovered among the Soviet forces. The young boy, Misha, is capable of staggering calculations, and is rushed to the Ural Mountains to direct the Soviet production and logistics.

January 18, 1943—Jewish resistors and Nephilim clash with German forces within the Warsaw Ghetto, killing over forty Germans, several hundred Jews and a German Übermensch. Shocked, the German forces regroup outside the Ghetto for another assault.

February 10, 1943—Major Peter Cesay manifests his Talent ability during a demonstration of newly discovered Talents in England. Cesay demonstrates a power codenamed “Zed” (for the “Z” in “zero”) which negates Talent abilities by counteracting their physical effect on the world.

February 26, 1943—American Army personnel discover Wendell Greene. Greene, America’s first “Goldberg Scientist” can construct outlandish science fiction-like devices that work, but only in his presence. He is assigned to the U.S. Army Air Corps for training.

March 12, 1943—A powerful Indian Talent claiming to be Lord Yama, the Indian God of Death, appears in Eastern India and soon gains a following of nearly a million. Despite British efforts to disrupt his growing power, Yama's influence soon becomes impossible to deny. Troops loyal to Yama fight alongside British forces against the Japanese—in exchange for the British promise to recognize Yama's independent country once the war is over.

April 19, 1943—The resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto continues after three months of hard fighting. Thousands of Jews, four hundred SS men and twelve Übermenschen have perished in the combat. As the Twenty-first Panzer Division rolls into the Ghetto an enormous combat ensues, claiming nineteen tanks and 750 Germans. The Germans retreat once again.

May 10, 1943—America's first Hyperbrain, Eli "the Brain" Watson is discovered in a national search for Talents. He is quickly moved to Los Alamos to assist in the construction of the atomic bomb.

May 16, 1943—Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto collapses. Only a half a dozen Jewish resistance fighters are captured.

May 29, 1943—The first German Hyperbrain, Das Archiv ("The Archive") joins the SS in a calculated attempt to steer the war towards closure. He fails to win Hitler's ear, and the war drags on.

June 21, 1943—America's first "mad Talent," Harry "Super-Man" O'Malley, manifests on New Georgia. Using his newfound strength and speed, O'Malley destroys all Japanese resistance on the island. He then proceeds to disarm American troops and refuses to continue to fight against the Japanese. On June 27 four Marine Talents disable O'Malley and a month later he is lobotomized.

July 4, 1943—The definitive battle for Russia—the battle of Kursk—begins. Hundreds of German super-men are killed in the fighting, along with thousands of pieces of irreplaceable German equipment. The eastern front is within months of crumbling completely.

August 7, 1943—Moments away from capture by an Allied Talent team, former Dictator of Ita-



ly Benito Mussolini commits suicide by hanging himself.

September 8, 1943—The first known Italian Talent, L'Immortale (“the Immortal”), is discovered amidst the Germans’ looting of Northern Italy. The youth goes on to lead a spirited resistance against the Germans and Italian fascists.

December 1, 1943—A German Übermensch captured on the Eastern coast of Long Island, New York, is put to death by lethal injection in Albany State Prison after a prolonged military trial.

June 6, 1944—Thousands of Allied Talents participate in Operation Overlord, the long-planned Allied invasion of Nazi Europe. In a particularly symbolic combat, the Polish Talent Cien knocks the German Der Flieger from the air with his telekinesis.

July 20, 1944—Hitler survives a devastating bomb blast contrived by members of his High Command to remove him from the equation. Over the next year dozens of high-ranking officials are implicated and executed for their part in the plot.

August 21, 1944—Der Flieger, the first known Talent, is killed over London by the newly devel-

oped proximity fuse of the American Army. These new shells can detect moving objects and detonate only when a target is within range. Though the German had proved too fast for previous anti-aircraft rounds, he is blown to bits by the new American weapon.

August 25, 1944—The Second Free French Armored Division and American and British troops liberate Paris. For several weeks German Übermenschen wreak havoc, destroying buildings and killing American and French officials, before they are finally rooted out.

September 20, 1944—During the poorly planned Operation Market Garden, over forty Talents from both sides converge on Holland. Twenty-one Talents perish in the combat.

December 16, 1944—In a last ditch effort to turn the tide of the war, German forces, including SS Uberkommandogruppen Heinrich Himmler, smash through Allied lines in Belgium. A huge battle at Spa ensues six days later, claiming the lives of nearly every Übermensch sent into battle. Within a week, the German offensive—the last in the war—collapses.



April 10, 1945—The last pocket of German and Italian resistance in Italy collapses.

April 12, 1945—Just weeks before the end of the war in Europe, President Roosevelt dies from a massive cerebral hemorrhage. Truman is sworn in as president as American troops push towards Leipzig.

April 23, 1945—Soviet Forces engage German troops within the borders of Berlin. Thousands of Talents clash in a final battle for the capital of Germany. Hitler and his lackeys commit suicide one by one on April 30th, as the Soviets creep closer to his bunker. On May 1st the Soviet Flag is flown from the Reichstag, bringing the war in the east to an end.

July 15, 1945—2,000 Soviet Talents defect to British lines, causing a political nightmare between American, British and Soviet politicians. Stalin demands their return, but Truman and Atlee refuse.

July 16, 1945—The Potsdam conference ends quickly, as Truman and Attlee fail to give in to Stalin's demands for the return of his Talents. A terse note from the Russian embassy in Washington informs the American forces that the Russians will not be participating in the war against Japan.

August 6, 1945—An American made atomic bomb is dropped on the Japanese port city of Hiroshima, annihilating it. Three days later, when the Japanese refuse to surrender, another bomb is dropped on Nagasaki. The Japanese government unconditionally surrenders to the Americans, bringing the war to an end.

September 6, 1946—Prime Minister Ben-Gurion declares Israel an independent nation.

1947 onward—After the end of the Second World War, few believed things would grow worse instead of better, but Russian adventurism, the drive for Middle Eastern self-government, the conflict in Korea and Vietnam, as well as the growing population of Wild Talents threw the world into a turmoil of confusion, violence, and uncertainty from which it seemed it could never rise.

What is a Wild Talent?

Wild Talents are Talents whose abilities are not subject to the canceling effects found in normal Talents. In effect, they can make the impossible happen without fear of interference or detection by another Talent. Wild Talents can permanently alter matter, create high-tech reproducible "Talent machinery," read minds, travel through time, and break every law that restricted the previous generation of Talents.

They are in effect gods of a very narrow capacity, able to manipulate reality in very specific ways. Unlike previous superhumans, these manipulations are sometimes permanent and inalterable. They are the next step in the development of the human mind.

Wild Talents should be built using the rules in this book, not those in the *Godlike* rulebook. Wild Talents lack the ability to detect and cancel the powers of others of their kind. There are no battles of Will to see whose power is stronger.

Wild Talents are often so possessed of self-belief that they subconsciously alter local physical effects to protect themselves. Whether this means they side-step a bullet or shake off a devastating attack, they are just plain hard to kill. See "Shaking It Off," page 53.

Because they can alter reality permanently, Wild Talents can purchase any of the Archetypes or meta-qualities available at character creation. One may not actually be an Alien, a Godling or a Mutant, but if that's what a Talent believes, then that's what he is.

Wild Talents should be built between 250 and 500 Points. Truly world-changing Wild Talents can be built up to 700 points or more, but few in this range have ever existed.

The Deepening Abyss (1946 to 1952)

“Nothing will rise from the war fires of the West but ashes.” *Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Responding to the official protest of the Soviet Occupation of Iran, May 7, 1946.*

The rift between Soviet and Western governments began long before the Talent defection of 1945. The defection was only a convenient excuse for Stalin to begin his long-range plans for the subjugation of the West. The blockade of Berlin, the seizure of Iran, the overtures to occupation in the Middle East—each was a carefully-measured stab at the West to test the mettle of the leaders of the free world.

The Berlin Blockade (1946)

Just months after the end of combat in Europe, Soviet forces suddenly closed off the “free zones” of Berlin from the West, sealing all rail, water and road traffic into the British, American and French occupation zones and leaving 100,000 people without adequate supplies, encircled by the vast Soviet Army.

Relations between the “big three” had degenerated to the point where the Soviets had withdrawn their “offer” to fight alongside the U.S. in the closing months of the war in the Pacific. Stalin, unusually silent on the matter, refused to meet with President Truman or the American ambassador in Moscow.

On March 12, 1946, regular American Air Force flights began to and from the free zones delivering tons of food, medicine, oil and equipment to the people of Free Berlin. Dozens of Allied Talents assisted in the lifts, moving supplies through teleportation, super-strength and telekinesis. For 200

Campaign Setting: ‘Ghosts’

Impossible tasks call for impossible men. In the World Gone Mad, the Cold War runs a bit hotter than in our own. Within a month of the closing of “Iron Curtain,” Western Talents were flowing in and out of the Soviet zones with regularity.

There, in the ruins of Communist Germany and even deeper into Soviet territory, government Talents and Wild Talents struggled to uncover troop dispositions, future plans, intel on operational agents and any other significant fact which might give the Western powers an upper hand in the war everyone believed was coming.

Agents were lost routinely, and captured Wild Talent agents knew enough to wish they had died. The Soviets maintained a special facility for captured Talents called “Коробка” or “The Box.” Not a single captured Talent escaped the mysterious facility. In fact, it cost four lives to definitively uncover its existence.

Ghosts are Wild Talents, Western agents on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. They gain their name from the Soviet Division of the KGB tasked with hunting them, known as the “Охотники привидения” (“Ghost Hunters”), a crack group of Wild Talents bent on the destruction of enemy agents.

Ghosts are deniable assets, assumed lost when captured. As such they are told little and often operate for weeks or months without sanctioned contact. They are loyal, driven, resourceful agents who have a longer operational existence than the average agent by a factor of ten.

Those who live long enough to become veterans know the rules: no one is your friend, everyone is against you, there is no such thing as truth. There is one thing and one thing only: the mission.



days the deliveries continued, until without warning in 1947 the Soviets reopened traffic into the free zones. The situation improved as quietly and suddenly as it had soured. No one had any idea why.

These incidents—a test by the powers in Moscow—led directly to the Truman doctrine. Later that month, President Truman announced to the world that the United States would support any government with financial aid, weapons and supplies to fight the expansion of communism. Sides began to be drawn. The Cold War had officially begun.

The Russians in Iran (1946)

When American and British troops withdrew from Iran in 1946, they expected the occupying Russian forces to follow. Instead, in August 1946, the Soviets suddenly poured troops into the country, reinforcing their already strong position. By the time the American ambassador in Moscow could protest, the young Shah of Iran had been ousted in “a purely internal matter” and replaced by leaders of the Tudeh party, a group of religious radicals calling for a return to Sharia law—rule by the laws of the Koran.

The Tudeh party had many advantages, not the least of which was their significant Talent population. After years of persecution at the hands of the Shah’s men, the Tudeh Talents, known as the Baqaya Jihannam (“Survivors of Hell”)—or more often simply as the Jihad—began a campaign of bloody murder across Iran to “cleanse it of the filth of the West.” Russian soldiers watched as the radical Talents butchered thousands.

In a speech to the general assembly of the United Nations, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko praised the “rightful revolt of the working class in the much-abused nation of Iran.” Despite numerous protests and threats, Stalin refused to recall troops from the nation, claiming he could “not trust the vacillating nations of the West to allow for self-government.”

The leader of the Tudeh party, Hussein Al Mahir praised Soviet aid as “vital to the restoration of Sharia rule,” and in November 1946 signed a mutual defense pact with the Soviet Union.

Iran was now, in all but name, a puppet of the U.S.S.R.

Deep Freeze

The gradual decline of relations with the Soviet Union that marked the Cold War in our world was in the World Gone Mad a full-on severing of ties, occurring not over years but weeks. Relationships soured during the end of WWII and completely collapsed shortly thereafter. The Cold War unofficially began in 1945 and opened publicly in 1946 with the Soviets' refusal to move their occupation troops from Iran.

Bold Soviet moves in Iran, American Hyperbrain projections and other Talent intelligence led President Truman to more hawkish conclusions than his real-world counterpart. Despite his hard-nosed stance, however, he was largely seen as a "lame duck" President, and General Douglas MacArthur's triumphant victory and reunification of North and South Korea in 1951 stole much of Truman's thunder.

Instead of the false sense of order brought in our world by the U.N. and the end of World War II, the world of Wild Talents was immediately thrust into a new, ever-growing, quiet conflict of assassination, proxy war and sabotage between the world's only two remaining super-powers.

Movement in the Middle-East

Hyperbrains on both sides of the Cold War saw clearly where the conflict between the Eagle and Bear would lie: the Middle East. Each super-power relied upon fossil fuels to power their economies. Without them, the Cold War would be lost.

It was well known that the Middle East held more than 80% of the world's oil fields (at the time, mostly untapped) and that their governments were looking for outside support to bolster their nations following World War II. Both America and Russia took an aggressive stance on the matter. Russia "freed" Iran; America sent advisors and signed a mutual defense treaty with Iraq; Russia armed Israeli-extremists hoping for the conflict to bleed

over into Syria; America supplied arms and training to the Palestinian separatists and the Syrian Army.

Before anyone knew it, the Middle East was a morass of political treaties worse than anything that had been seen before, making the pre-war silence of 1914 Europe look like a happy memory. Each move and countermove only deepened the danger. By 1971, American and Soviet troops occupied opposing sides of the partition in Lebanon, facing one another across a no man's land ripe to become the home of the first public face-to-face conflict between the super-powers in the Cold War.

Soviet Infiltration

The Soviets, on their part, were not averse to actively exploiting the growing communist movements around the globe. By 1947 dozens of world governments such as Belgium, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Vietnam, India and Japan had large communist minorities opposing democratic government. The Soviets' web of spies—many of which had been put in place as early as the late 1920s—grew exponentially around the globe, particularly in Western Europe, North America and Latin America.

With these spy rings the Soviets managed to steal wartime secrets from the U.S., including plans for proximity fuses, design documents from Lockheed aircraft, various bomb-sight technologies and, worse, the principle of the creation of a "Fat Man"-style nuclear weapon from the Los Alamos laboratories (later perfected by the Soviets in 1947).

Though the threat was understood by the Western powers, no one imaged the depth of the problem until September 12, 1950, when it was discovered a Chinese Wild Talent spy ring had been operating in and around Moscow for two and a half years. The Soviets, masters of espionage, had been taken by a fledgling government with rudimentary intelligence

services. This raised eyebrows in established security services around the world.

In addition to souring Soviet/Red Chinese relations for decades, this discovery forced the establishment of new security principles in the United States by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The classified order NSC-0191, called the "Foreign Intelligence Agents Directive," was created in part by a quartet of Hyperbrains in the employ of the National Security Council. Their plan was simple, as far as the Hyperbrains were concerned: feed carefully-crafted "keys" of information amidst thousands of intelligence reports throughout all aspects of the U.S. Federal government. Ten to eighteen months later, all American intel on the Soviets would be gathered and pored through by these Hyperbrains. Buried in these reports, the tell-tale signs of their "keys" could be detected, and once detected, isolated to a particular section of government. From there, profiles of the individuals employed in those sections would be reviewed, and if necessary interviewed.

It was often not necessary, as American intelligence's vetting process had been severely flawed during the war. Most turned agents were readily discoverable through simple means.

On October 6, 1951, with the FBI's simultaneous arrest of nearly 200 individuals throughout North America, the level of infiltration of Soviet spies could

no longer be concealed. America erupted in turmoil. Newspapers were filled with headlines of "Red Spies," and Senator Joseph McCarthy—already well under way in his "commie" witch-hunt—grabbed on to this fear and magnified it.

What was not known was that by 1951, the Soviets had two levels of espionage in place. The first was their conventional spy-rings. The second was composed of fourteen Hyperbrains scattered around the globe. This group utilized hundreds of methods to get what they wanted, from simple telephone calls to blind agents who had no idea who they were working for, all the way down to conventional spies who had no visibility past their own activities. The Hyperbrains were obviously brilliant, but operated on a level never before seen. Utilizing codes, one-off languages and other techniques to scatter blame, defy detection and stop counter-espionage, the Soviet Hyperbrains operated for a decade before their existence was even confirmed.

This group, long rumored to be nothing but a fiction, was confirmed in 1961 with the capture of Vasili Tyg, the Hyperbrain leader of the Soviet spy-rings in Europe.

"It is chess," he was quoted as saying at his trial. "But while you play for pieces, we play for the board."

Ha-Esh ('The Fire'): Israel's Talent Defense Force

Due to the horrors inflicted by the Nazis in WWII, the Jewish people manifested a much higher percentage of Talents per capita than nearly any other group in Europe. By the end of the war, Allied governments were struggling with what to do with the ad hoc army of Jewish superhumans loitering around Europe. They were moved to Palestine to hopefully silence an increasingly violent cry for a Jewish homeland. Few cared about the disposition of Palestine; the Soviet Union taking advantage of a weakened Europe was the predominant fear.

The power that made possible the declaration by Ben-Gurion of Israel in 1946 was Ha-Esh ("the Fire"), Israel's nearly 5,000 Nephilim volunteers. These individuals were, for the most part battle-hardened veterans that had fought an impromptu guerilla war across Europe from 1942 onwards.

In Palestine they organized under Jewish military personnel, and by 1946 they were a truly dangerous organization serving at the whim of the fledgling Israeli government.

After the 1946 First Arab-Israeli war, the Fire were seen as the most dangerous military force in the Middle East. Few military planners could deny Israel had the most organized, creatively-executed and well-managed Talent army on the planet. In fact, it became the model for both the Buran (the Soviet Talent special forces) and U.S. Team One (U.S. Army Talent special forces).

Throughout the forty years leading up to the Builder Invasion, the Fire has never lost a conflict (though several actions remain classified). Their motto is "If You Will It, It Is Not a Dream".

The Fire has fought in conflicts around the globe, assisting Israel's allies as well as executing special operations against Nazi war criminals, enemies of Israel and terrorist organizations.

Al Jihad, Baqaya Jihannam ('The Survivors of Hell')

The group of devout Muslim Talents known as the "Survivors of Hell" fought successfully for the return of Iran to Sharia rule. With Soviet assistance the pro-Western government of Iran was disposed of, and control of the country (under the watchful eye of Moscow) was given to Mullah Hussein Al Mahir, a powerful Talent leader.

With vast military aid from the Soviet Union and a cadre of deadly, war-tested Talents, this force would go on to wreak havoc in countries where Muslims were persecuted or in armed conflict. This included but was not limited to Iraq, Egypt, the state of Pakistan and, first and foremost, Israel.

One of Al Mahir's first fatwas (a religious announcements) was to call for the destruction of Israel. For the next forty years, Al Jihad, Baqaya Jihannam (later known only as "the Jihad") caused tens of thousands of casualties, mostly in the Middle East.

Their most dramatic attack, however, occurred in 1994, in the infamous "Black Wednesday" destruction of the Eiffel Tower by a lone Wild Talent. Calling himself Yaum Al-Qiyâmah ("Day of Judgment"), the Talent killed a half-dozen Police Spéciale Talents and then uprooted the tower and threw it onto the Jardin du Champ de Mars, killing more than 450 people and leveling a world landmark. Though Yaum Al-Qiyâmah was killed in the attack, the Jihad won a dramatic victory against the "oppressive government of France which has long exploited our Muslim brothers."

The First Arab-Israeli War and Forced Partition (1946)

British forces withdrew from Trans-Jordan and Palestine in the summer of 1946 after months of relentless attacks by both Arab and Jewish forces struggling for independence from Mandate rule. After a bombing claimed the lives of 157 British personnel in Jerusalem, Britain withdrew from the region, declaring the conflict an “internal matter.”

Armed with over 5,000 Talents, the Israelis were a significant power in the region, and their demands for a sovereign state could no longer be ignored. The Arab majority first resented the British partition, and later the British abandonment of plans for a split nation. When the Israelis flexed their Talent muscle and staked claim to much of what had been declared Arab territory in the British Mandate plan, the conflict, already bloody, grew dire. The U.N. was powerless to prevent the declaration of the independent State of Israel by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on September 6, 1946, amidst growing riots and outright warfare on the Trans-Jordanian border.

On September 9, 1946 Egypt, Syria, Trans-Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded Israel. Lasting four weeks, the first Arab-Israeli war claimed 7,000 lives but the Arab nations held no ground at the end. Thanks to Talent support, Israel managed to expel the Arab forces and declared the holy city of Jerusalem Israeli territory.

Despite some public support, the American government chose not to side with Israel. Many in the U.S. saw it as a dangerous and ultimately disruptive force in the Middle East, and the government issued protests at the U.N. against Israeli policy and failed to vote for the recognition of the state in 1947. With thousands of Talents, Israel was never seen as a defenseless country in the midst of enemies; it was seen as the super-power of the region.

Russian support for the establishment of Israel during the 1947 U.N. vote to recognize the fledgling nation turned the tide—without it, the country would have failed official recognition. This marked the beginning of Soviet influence in Israeli affairs, despite politically opposing ideals and Russia’s history of violence against the Jewish people. Russia’s support was largely material, and allowed Israel wide latitude in internal matters, while America was seen as meddling and dictatorial. Stalin saw the chance to stir the hornets’ nest of the Middle East in the hopes things would spiral out of control and allow its countries to be plucked up, one by one, as new satellites in the growing Soviet empire.

Israel explored their new power in 1947 with the “Forced Partition” policy—tens of thousands of “dissidents,” mostly of Arab descent, were ejected into Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. This move drew the ire of the world, but it also established stability in Israel. The year-old country was suddenly an island of peace in a sea of violence that was the Middle East.



GEN. 75 Tests the First British Atomic Bomb (1946)

Stunning the world—and particularly America—the British government suddenly tested its first Atomic weapon at the Monte Bello islands off the coast of Australia. The weapon, code-named HURRICANE, was a moderately large explosion, on par with the Hiroshima device.

Working in secret since the return of British participants in the Manhattan project in early 1945, GEN. 75 was a secret group that hoped to replicate a “Fat Man”-style device. Using a breakthrough mixture of Talent powers and intelligence, the group managed to build a crude weapon in only eight months.

What most did not know was that the core of the weapon was very special, created by British Talent Oliver “Transmuter” Yarrow, a Talent who could manipulate the atomic structure of metals. The core was nothing more than a grapefruit-sized lump of lead. Yarrow’s power removed much of the “busy work” which had consumed the Manhattan project, isolating Uranium-235 from the soil, particle by particle. This secret was so significant Yarrow’s power was classified and he was isolated from the general public for nearly two years.

The most significant downside was this effect could not be mass-produced. Yarrow was required to stay within a mile of the core at all times, or his power failed—a dangerous proposition for the test site. But it was easier to construct an atom bomb-proof bunker just under a mile from ground zero than to create the core from scratch.

Despite stern comments from President Truman, Prime Minister Attlee was eager to share the fact with the world that Britain had the bomb. This “paper tiger,” the belief in British atomic bombs, fooled the world for nearly twenty-five years. It was not until the early 1970s that the press discovered Yarrow’s contribution to HURRICANE.

The U.K.’s Ace in the Hole

In late 1944, the British captured vital Nazi research into the nature of Talent powers. This research, called the Gelb Haus Projekt (“Yellow House Project”), was an attempt to boost Talent powers by manipulating the mind of the Talent through subtle psychological means.

By 1946, British scientists at the Special Sciences Office had made startling breakthroughs with the research. Suddenly they were manufacturing Talents, and later created Talents who violated the classical “Talent laws.” This new breed of Talents, called “Wild Talents,” would be responsible for the ever-growing world conflict as their very presence destabilized the social order.

It is unknown if the public announcement of the first British Wild Talent Grey somehow “unlocked” the ability in the world—since soon all Talents manifesting were Wild Talents—or if it marked a natural evolution of the phenomenon. However, this breakthrough gave the British an advantage. For twenty years they guarded the main secret of the Nazi research: the ability to manufacture Talents in particular individuals.

This led to the U.K. being a significant world power when it came to Wild Talent population. By 1977, the British Talent Corps numbered nearly 25,000, placing them in the same league as the Soviet Union and U.S.

Nuclear Creation, Escalation and Obsolescence

For two decades, nuclear weapons—first pioneered in the United States near the end of World War II—were the obsession of every major world government. Their destructive capability, useful both as a deterrent and a threat, was seen as the ultimate brass ring for every military of sufficient size to attempt creating one.

During the brief twenty years when nuclear weapons were the most destructive non-Talent force on the planet, eight world governments announced the creation and detonation of a nuclear weapon. Many of these countries achieved this breakthrough with the assistance of Hyperbrain Wild Talents or Gadgeteers. These countries were, in order of appearance: the United States (1945), the United Kingdom (1946), the Soviet Union (1947), France (1950), China (1954), India (1955), Israel (1956) and South Africa (1959).

Of course, the Soviet Union and the United States were the most prolific producers of nuclear weaponry; the arms race between these two nations seemed poised to last indefinitely, but it was suddenly derailed in the summer of 1960.

American intelligence discovered Soviet research into Directed Kinetic Weaponry—the ability to hurl huge space rocks with pinpoint accuracy anywhere on the globe. These rocks would produce similar destructive effects to nuclear weapons, without producing radiation or any other lasting effect, thereby bypassing all the nuclear treaties signed to date. Their low cost, selective destructive yield, and

lack of aftereffects made them the most significant advancement in artillery to date.

By 1964 both America and the Soviet Union were abandoning their research into bigger and better nuclear weapons. Instead, they were focused on building rail-guns in space used to direct, accelerate and smash space rocks into targets on the Earth.

By 1969 each government was poised to launch a first-strike on the other with Directed Kinetic Weapons. Nuclear weapons had faded to obsolescence, piled onto an ever-growing list of weaponry no longer used in warfare.

Less advanced nuclear-capable governments were left in a difficult position. There was no stigma in using Directed Kinetic Weapons; they were, quite simply, huge artillery shells that could be calibrated to destroy a building or a mountain range. Nuclear weapons, however, were seen as a horrific threat that left victims who survived the blast to waste away from radiation sickness.

All world governments saw the writing on the wall. If they used nuclear weaponry, the United States or the Soviet Union could easily cripple them with DKW and overwhelm them with their massive military forces. By 1971, nearly all nuclear programs and weaponry around the globe were mothballed in search of newer, cleaner, more exact weapons.

With a world awash in Gadgeteers and Hyperbrains, it is only a matter of time before something better is discovered.

Egyptian Independence and the Free Officers Movement (1946)

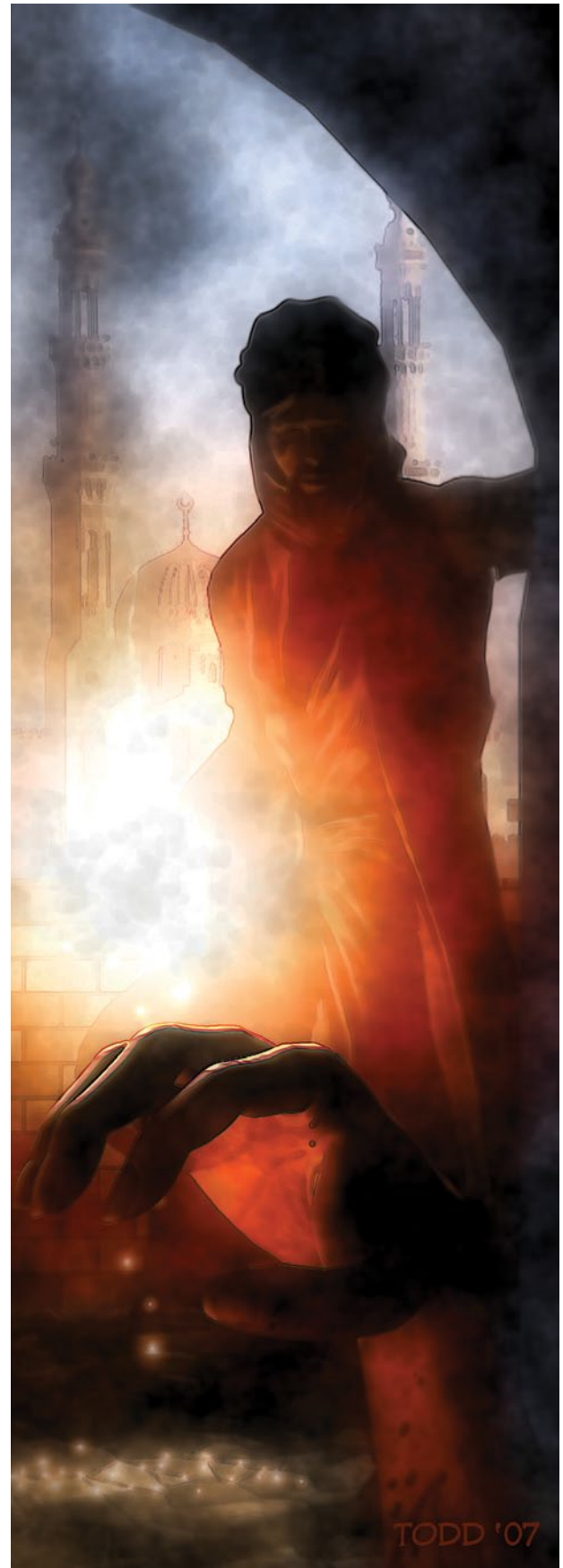
Known as the El-Dhobatt El-Ahrar, a growing group of Egyptian officers saw their chance at freedom from British rule with the establishment of Israel near the end of 1946. With the Empire crumbling, Britain was tired of conflict and would likely recall their troops if things in Egypt grew worse. The Free Officers movement, aligning itself with the anti-Western group the Muslim Brotherhood, set about a campaign of terror to oust the British from the country.

Random attacks on British nationals led to the recall of all non-essential British personnel and nationals from Egypt in November 1946. British military presence only increased, however, especially around the vital Suez Canal, and Churchill's rhetoric grew more menacing as British troops poured into every major Egyptian city.

The decadent King Farouk of Egypt refused to back the call for freedom from British rule—he had too much at stake in the Empire and was despised by his subjects. Two failed assassination attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood led (with British assistance) to a sudden crackdown on the underground in an attempt to gain control of the worsening situation.

Informants exposed several leading members of the Brotherhood and the Free Officers. Both groups' leaders were rounded up and shot along with dozens of others. General Naguib and Hassan el Banna were executed by the command of King Farouk on December 8, 1946, signaling the end of the uneasy peace Egypt had enjoyed since the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1922.

Instead of ending the civil unrest, the violence escalated. On December 20, 1946, led by a young officer, Gamal Nasser, one quarter of the Egyptian Army rose up in a bloodless coup and seized vital ports, all significant members of the Egyptian gov-



TODD '07

Campaign Setting: The Cauldron

The Middle East promises to be the flashpoint in a war which might consume the globe.

From 1946 onwards, the Soviet and American governments perform a complex dance, allying themselves with one group to cause another to fold, shift or change. By the 1960s the region is a trip-mine of political alliances, waiting for a single misstep to set it off.

Whether you are a member of Syria's elite American-backed units fighting Zionist insurgency, or a member of Ha-Esh ("The Fire"), Israel's unstoppable Talent army, you fight for the sovereignty of your homeland. Dealing with Soviet and American agents, Wild Talent terrorists in the service of your enemies, and religious radicals of your own country, the setting is ripe for adventure.

ernment, and captured the highest-ranking British officer in Cairo as well as King Farouk.

Declaring Egyptian independence and calling for the expulsion of all Western influence, Nasser became a hero and leader of the Egyptian people and gained unprecedented popular support, including the fanatical legions of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Thousands of British soldiers in the country remained, however. In early 1947, fearful of a British attempt to seize control, the Muslim Brotherhood began a systematic campaign of murder throughout Egypt, killing several hundred high-ranking British officials in bomb attacks and shootouts. In March 1947, after a U.N.-negotiated cease-fire, all British military personnel were withdrawn from Egypt. Twenty-one thousand British soldiers—along with 1,500 Talents—remained at the Suez Canal.

Furious, Prime Minister Attlee warned that any attempt by the Egyptians to seize the canal would be an act of war on the British people. His implication was that if pushed, Britain would use the atomic bomb on her enemies. The message was clear: The Egyptians could have their country back, but the Canal was—and would forever remain—British soil.

Soon, an uneasy peace fell over the region as General Nasser agreed to a U.N.-negotiated, two-mile, British-controlled "Canal Zone." Over the next five years, this area saw a vast increase in troops, weapons and emplacements. Soon more than 55,000 British troops, 1,500 fighter aircraft, 250 tanks and nearly 2,500 Talents occupied a thin strip of land on the canal.

The Marshall Plan and the Talent Volunteers (1947)

Following World War II, Europe was decimated. Millions of displaced persons wandered the newly free zones of France, West Germany, Belgium and Italy. The infrastructure that the Allies worked so hard to destroy to stop the Nazi war machine was now in dire need of repair. Tens of thousands were without adequate water, food and shelter.

U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall announced the Marshall Plan, a huge package of financial aid from the U.S. to restore Europe. In addition, in an impassioned speech to the press in London, Marshall begged key Talent personnel to remain behind and assist in the reconstruction efforts. Surprisingly, many did.

These "Talent Volunteers" were an unlikely crew of individuals, including such famous Talents as Bulldog and Pevnost. Their impromptu leader was Leopold "Szin" Janus, a quiet Hungarian who managed to make international news by giving newly reconstructed buildings in Europe intricate and breathtakingly beautiful colors with his power.

The Teevees (Talent Volunteers)

The Talent Volunteers would grow to become a powerful and controversial worldwide organization. Up until the 1960s the group was involved mostly in reconstruction efforts in Europe and infrastructure-building programs in southeast Asia and Africa. Their nine-year rural electrification program in Burma led directly to that country's economic boom in the 1970s, and their irrigation projects in Libya turned it into a peaceful world leader in cotton production.

In the early days, they were much like the Peace Corps but with a superhuman bent.

However, by the late 1960s the organization had become an interlinked and international group of thousands of powerful Wild Talents that hoped to change the world in a more direct manner. Unofficially, things began happening behind the scenes that were as necessary as they were disturbing. Dictators-in-training in the poorer countries around the world began disappearing with startling regularity: nine in southern Africa and three in Central America in the early 1970s alone. Weapons turned up in the hands of rebels with right on their side, food in the hands of those who needed it, and dissidents with no hope of escape from oppressive regimes often found themselves in New York, London or Geneva with no explanation. The Teevees' goals frequently conflicted with those of the world governments.

This led the Teevees to scandal. In 1975, one of their most famous American members—Alan J. Resa, a Talent known for his ability to hide up to 20 tons of material in a "pocket dimension" he carried with him—was subpoenaed before Congress. He was accused of "interfering" with American interests in Ecuador, moving weapons and food, assisting rebels and "displacing American agents" with his powers. He was given a choice: Face charges of treason or report those Talents who assisted him and reveal "the vast and hidden network of disruptive Teevee

forces." Resa refused to testify and was convicted of contempt of court, serving a three-year sentence. He was released in 1979 as a national hero, bringing a disastrous end to a CIA plot to remove the Teevees from the circle of world influence.

The U.S. government did its best to defame the Teevees in America in the late 1970s, but failed miserably. The Teevees assisted in more than 40 hurricane, tornado and earthquake relief projects in the U.S. in the 1970s, restoring destroyed regions faster than any government agency could. They did so without public cost, or even waiting for an invitation. When trouble happened, the Teevees were there.

Today, with the Teevees' vast resources and popularity, many governments see them as almost a "shadow government" that monitors the world. Though it exists in nearly every free country on Earth and its membership reads like a who's who of Wild Talents, the Teevees remain largely aloof to international politics, preferring to interfere where their personal interests take them.

Often, those interests lead them into danger.

Teevee Membership

Joining the Talent Volunteers is as easy as having a superpower. Though the Teevees employ many non-powered individuals in support roles, the membership of the Teevees is exclusively composed of Wild Talents. This has led to controversy, and has sometimes gained the ire of the press; many fringe elements lump the Teevees in with the Cabal, the Freemasons, the Gnomes of Zurich and other bizarre conspiracy theories of world-ruling secret groups. But dozens of exposés, hidden-camera stories and other probes have revealed little in the way of a world-spanning conspiracy. The Teevees, like any other large organization, can hardly agree on a yearly venue for their North American convention, much less the disposition of world government. The group is composed of hundreds of races, nationalities, political movements and more—they are, in short, a microcosm of the world—united only by possession of a Talent and the urge to help those less fortunate.

The Teevees' stated goal is "the peaceful use of Talent powers to improve the world for all humanity." To this end they are very successful. Every year, hundreds of volunteer projects all over the globe use the incredible powers of Wild Talents to change the face of human existence. Even in countries which fear Talent power and influence, the change and economic advantages offered by such projects is so great that there are few leaders who can refuse such an offer.

Even when they are refused, there are Wild Talents in their membership—such as Iceblink, Emmanuel "le Professeur" Amadin, and George "Unstoppable" Murphy—who are seen as forces of nature, people not easily denied or turned away by even the strongest world powers. These Wild Talents have the capability of shutting down small countries in the blink of an eye. Often, a first rebuttal of a Teevee

offer is met with a visit by some of their most powerful Talents. They are polite, courteous, come bearing gifts, and are very adamant about their desire to do good in said country. The implication, never stated outright, is that the Teevees could cripple an uncooperative regime without even exerting themselves.

So far—publicly at least—it has never come to that.

In everyday practice, the Teevees are about as malevolent as the Shriners. This is not to say they don't pack a punch; Teevees are outspoken, driven, powerful, and in individual or extraordinary circumstances, dangerous. But for the most part, they are an aid organization.

They are the single largest organization of superhumans on the planet, and according to computer projections could seize more than 25% of the world in a prolonged grab for power. No government interested in power is happy with their existence. Just because they are harmless now does not mean they will be harmless in the future. Both the Soviet Union and the United States keep an hour-to-hour track on all identified members of the Teevees, just in case.

Many smaller governments live in mortal fear of drawing the attention of the Teevees, and go out of their way to illustrate just how peaceful, humanitarian and cooperative they can be—even if they are third-world fascist regimes. Many smaller governments are far more engaged in keeping their press positive and heading off stories of human-rights abuse than actually correcting such abuse.

Oppressive regimes attempt to keep a tight wrap on their wrongdoing, to avoid drawing the ire of the Teevees. Power is no longer flaunted by oppressive regimes—instead, it is discovered by rumor and innuendo, making it far more difficult to document in the World Gone Mad than our own.

Teevee Facilities and Resources

Teevee members—as Talents—are usually far more fortunate than the average human. Some of the world's richest people are Wild Talents, and many spend their money on one thing: the Teevees. Since the Teevees are a unilateral organization that supports thousands of humanitarian projects of all types, they're always looking for funding.

Collection for this funding is two-fold. Huge gala events are held where the rich and famous get to hobnob with the powerful and famous. The Teevees hold a dozen yearly events collecting money for charity projects around the world.

Secondarily, in the modern era, Morgan Rhys—a Talent who can transfer consciousnesses between tailor-made bodies created by his will—is the single richest donor to the Teevees. His Switzerland-based Wild Talents wellness center (called “RENEW”) charges up to \$50 million per new body, and has serviced some of the most famous people in the world. Each year, Rhys is responsible for more than half the money the Teevees raise. In addition, a string of Rhys' homes, vehicles and facilities are open to Teevee use around the globe during Teevee operations.

Interestingly, no one but his personal entourage has seen Rhys in more than a decade.

Most Wild Talents do well enough for themselves that it rarely comes to relying on the Teevees for money. Endorse a car dealership here, do a children's book or some stunt work there and boom, you're affluent. But still, it's nice to find a safehouse in an enemy country when the chips are down. The average Teevee member takes a pledge upon joining the group to donate 25% of their income yearly to the group.

The Teevees' main location is the Mercator building, in New York on 41st Street East. It is a twisting high-rise which houses the logistical staff of the

Teevees. Many of the Teevee membership—those whose powers are on call all the time—call it home.

The building is a marvel, larger on the inside than on the outside, due to the incredible Wild Talent architect Emegre Salazar Bondi. The 66-story building somehow contains an amazing eight million square feet of offices, apartments and more. It is the single largest apartment building in the world. But due to its rather pedestrian height (for New York), this fact is often overlooked.

Amazingly, every room has a view.



Campaign Setting: A World Without Tyrants

Within the Teevees exist a small group of driven individuals with the power, wisdom and knowledge to do what must be done—the removal of anti-humanist regimes around the globe before they prosper and become entrenched.

This group is buried within the Teevee membership, but is a very real force of some of the most powerful Wild Talents on the planet. They never speak of their actions, even in Teevee company, and act only when a threat is brought to their attention.

Are the players inducted into this group? Perhaps a dam reconstruction project becomes a mission of espionage on a leader's estate in a third-world nation at the urging of a Teevee veteran. Or worse, a direct sighting of a crime against humanity urges the player to act, escalating things and drawing the attention of the group, or even the world. Imagine how Tiananmen Square might have played out with a superhuman standing between the tanks and students.

There are countless possibilities. Superpowered smuggling to run guns to third-world rebels. Saving political refugees held by enemy Wild Talents. Toppling regimes on the edge of creating Wild Talent weapons which might tip the balance of world power.

But what if the players discover the group at work in their country? When politicians with anti-Wild Talent or Teevee agendas start vanishing? When outspoken reporters who despise the Teevees turn up dead of self-inflicted wounds, what do the players do?

And what happens when they are approached by the FBI with proof the top-ranking Teevees can be linked to the crimes?

After Marshall's speech, Janus' small group soon found itself numbering just over 1,200 Talents of various powers. With their help, the reconstruction of Europe was achieved long before the target date. America's donation of \$13 billion in aid soon raised every country but Germany far past their pre-war economic levels.

The success of the Marshall Plan was seen as America's crowning achievement in the war in Europe; it also gave official international recognition of the Talent Volunteers (often called the "Teevees"). In 1969, Leopold Janus, still leader of the Talent Volunteers—by then a vast network—received the Nobel Peace Prize for his lifetime of work.

Wild Talents (1947)

The first recognized, publicly-known "Wild Talent," Grey, was announced by the British government on September 12, 1947. Unlike his predecessors, Grey was invisible to Talent detection.

Just weeks later, Stalin announced the Soviet Union's fourteen Wild Talents. Though limited footage was available in the west, intelligence Hyperbrains calculated it was likely that Stalin indeed had Wild Talents—perhaps more than fourteen.

By the winter of 1948, Wild Talents began springing up all around the globe, eventually replacing the more mundane Talent manifestations altogether. By 1949, every Talent manifesting was a Wild Talent. No one could understand why.

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GREY -- THE FIRST WILD TALENT

Name: Eric Holmes AKA Grey

DOB: February 11, 1923

Height: 5'10"

DOD: April 3, 1976

Weight: 200 lbs.

APPEARANCE: Grey's Talent ability affected his appearance. Though he appeared physically normal, anyone seeing his features, in person or in a photograph, found their memories of him vanished as quickly as they were formed. No one could describe him, not even his case officers. Even after his death his power remained active and his autopsy was unusually empty of descriptors.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: Grey had the ability to remain permanently anonymous. His power unconsciously rewrote the perceptions of those around him, even when seen through electronic devices, making him nothing more than a mere blur in memory just seconds after being observed. The true magic of his power was that no one noticed it in action. He appeared completely normal until he left, whereupon what had been a clear perception of a man would vanish, leaving behind only the dimmest traces of memory.

His name, Grey, comes from his appearance on recording mediums such as television, tape or film. He was remembered as nothing more than a gray blur, and his voice a disturbing and forgettable monotone.

Grey was also the first recognized "Wild Talent" (though Soviet scientists would later dispute this). His abilities were the first recognized to break the laws of Talent power.

HISTORY: Eric Holmes was a nondescript young clerk in the British Ministry of Defence. On his entrance exam, Holmes was randomly picked and subjected to a psychological battery of tests. At the time he had no idea why. The Special Sciences Office, using techniques gleaned from the German Gelb Haus Projekt, tested Holmes as a candidate for their Talent program.

Holmes found himself reassigned to an SSO office in isolated northern England, but still had no idea what was going on. The SSO subjected Holmes to subtle influences, controlling his interactions with people, places and things in a program carefully metered to fit his particular personality.

The program was a success, but due to the nature of that success no one noticed at first. The first "real" discovery of Holmes' unique nature was when an SSO case officer while filling out paperwork realized that he could not remember the name of the man he had been monitoring for 18 months.

From there, events rapidly took shape. British Hyperbrains determined that Holmes had "surpassed" the conventional Talent and was something much more dangerous. He was dubbed a "Wild Talent" and became the most important discovery in the British arsenal. For three months the British believed they alone had access to a power even greater than Talents. This did not last long.

Just twelve weeks later, British hyperbrains found another Wild Talent, a British short-order cook who could instantly create food. What was strange was that the man was unknown to the SSO and had not been subjected to the Gelb Haus methods. Like Holmes, he was not subject to the "Talent laws."

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British hyperbrains determined that it was likely a natural development of the Talent phenomena and soon would promulgate around the world. Prime Minister Attlee acted on the opportunity before any other country could announce the "discovery."

Grey, as Holmes was known to the world, became the first publicly-recognized Wild Talent in October 1947.

His actions during the Cold War, like his appearance, remained a blur. Even his case officers had trouble keeping track of his activities, and his reports, though concise, were often forgotten before they could be properly absorbed. Recordings of his comings and goings, as well as his assignments to particular projects, cause an untold amount of paperwork problems.

He retired to Bournemouth in 1971, and there became a celebrity -- when people could recall he lived there at all. He also became a popular television personality, hosting an interview program on BBC2 called Grey Speaks until his death in 1976 at age 53.



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India and Pakistan: Independence and War (1947)

Due to the growing Independence movement in various satellite nations and Britain's war-agreement to end colonial rule, both India and Pakistan were declared independent on August 15, 1947.

Complete turmoil followed. The British simply left. Every official British envoy, armed forces and all, was gone by August 15. The power structure in the country collapsed, leading to riots and destruction. The partition between Hindu majority and Muslim majority in India and Pakistan remained nothing more than lines on a map. Millions were killed. The Hindu, Sikh and Muslim populations continuously clashed, decimating the population of entire regions. Talent powers were soon being used. This escalated into a firestorm that could be briefly quieted but never quelled. The number of dead soon overshadowed Mahatma Gandhi's cries for peace. As the body count increased, Gandhi's sway over the Hindu and Muslim populations slipped away. Soon every major city in India, once ravaged by starvation, was burning. Then on October 9, 1947 a spectacular bomb attack on Birla House took the life of India's greatest leader. Mahatma, the great teacher Gandhi, was dead at the age of 78.

From there, the chaos deepened.

Finally, following an organized march on the Kashmir region by armed Pakistani Muslims, Indian forces declared war on Pakistan. It was what

Gandhi had feared most; rampant and violent Indian nationalism had come to pass. What was worse, the leader of the new Indian regime was one of his long-time allies, Sadar Patel.

A militaristic government grew around Patel, known as the Iron Man of India, who became president in late 1947. Patel felt that with India released from British control, it was India's duty to bring a swift and decisive end to the conflict.

Patel had the Indian army march first into Kashmir—without the consent of the Kashmiri Maharaja—and then on into Pakistan. By 1948, the Indian government had ousted what existed of Pakistani power in the civilized regions of the country and were pursuing Muslim separatist Mohammed Ali Jinnah in the mountains. Pakistan existed as a sovereign nation for only eight months: thereafter it was absorbed into the growing number of Indian states. Though this act was protested in both the news and the U.N., nothing was done about it. For the next decade, the persecution of Muslims in India and the Indian state of Pakistan continued unabated—and likewise, their Talent population soared.

But Patel was clever. Entertaining an envoy from Moscow was enough to bring the United States government calling. Soon, in 1949, Patel and President Truman signed the South Asia Defensive Pact (SADP), beginning a deep and ultimately fruitful alliance between the U.S. and India.



India - U.S. Relations

Indian President Sadar Patel was wise in the ways of Western politics and saw the choice between Soviet or American aid as a simple one—though he did not let the superpowers know this. Instead he entertained offers from both sides, pretending to consider each. Patel knew Stalin was not to be trusted, and that the Americans were idealistic and often foolish.

He accepted a vast package of military aid and America's assistance in quieting the absorption of Pakistan. In exchange, American armed forces were granted fly-over rights as well as two jointly-held airbases in northern India, on the border of the Soviet Union. Later this deal was cemented first into the SADP (South Asia Defensive Pact) and finally in India's 1959 induction into NATO along with Turkey. In 1960, mid-range nuclear missiles under NATO control were installed at these bases.

By 1961, the booming Indian economy and population made it a vital trading partner with the U.S. It was quite common for trinkets in American stores to be stamped with the legend "Made in India." It was also the first country to elect a Wild Talent President—the Hyperbrain Chandra Shankara was elected in a landslide in 1969—and he led the country on to further success. By 1971, with the personal computer revolution erupting around the world, India took a giant step forward, reworking vast areas of their economy to support the coming information economy. Cooperating with Xerox, the world leader in information technology, India set the pace for the adoption of computer technology. The U.S. and Britain found themselves playing catch up.

Later, as India grew into a super-power in its own right, it became a world leader in both software and information mining. Today it is seen as one of the pre-eminent world powers, only a hairsbreadth behind the United States and the Soviet Union. Its influence in world computing is unparalleled. The Indian software company Veda (which produces the

operating system Karma, which runs on more than 96% of existing computers worldwide) and its leader Abhijat Maharajapuram (the world's richest man) have controlled the world computer market since 1975 with no end in sight.

South Asia's Rise to Power

Vast reconstruction projects in the 1970s and 1980s reshaped India into a modern powerhouse. The country is covered in a road network that rivals the Autobahn, and crisscrossed by rail, light rail and canal transport. This vast re-imagining of the country (the so-called "Catapult Plan" created by President Chandra Shankara in the early 1970s) is singularly responsible for India's resilience as a world power. No other country on the globe except perhaps the Soviet Union has the infrastructure to reshape itself on the fly as much as India.

When telecommuting to work by computer became a reality in the early 1980s, no country was prepared for the vast shift in its workforce except India. Within a decade, nearly half of India's enormous population had moved from physical labor to telecommuting jobs. The ability to retrain such a vast number of people was possible only because the entire economy, government structure and physical infrastructure had been nearly perfectly imagined by a single mind nearly two decades before.

By 1990, New Delhi is spoken of in the same breath as Tokyo, London and New York. It is the capital of the growing influence of the Indian empire and is the mecca of high technology.

Abhijat Maharajapuram put India's rise best when he said: "As a people, we are uniquely qualified to turn our lives at a moment's notice. For eighty-eight years we lived under a foreign yoke. Now, with nearly limitless choice, it is only natural that old orders are suddenly upset and overturned by the new."

Roswell (1947)

Something crashed outside of Roswell, New Mexico on the evening of July 4, 1947, just fifty miles from the 509th Tactical Bomb Wing—America's only atomic-capable bomber squadron. A startling turn of events followed. First it was announced to the press that a spacecraft had been recovered in the desert; then the Air Force refused to comment on what was recovered; and then as phone calls came in from all points of the globe, they claimed the wreckage was simply a weather balloon.

They stuck to this story.

In actuality, what appeared to be one of the ubiquitous “Flying Discs” seen in the air all over the world since 1945 had crashed outside Roswell that night, disgorging a single living passenger, a svelte alien calling itself IAM. To outside observers, including two Air Force Hyperbrains, IAM seemed like the real deal. He wasn't a Talent in any conventional sense, and the technology he landed in seemed centuries ahead of even their advanced minds. No one could piece together just what he was. Though he spoke perfect, polite English, he refused to elaborate on just what brought him to Earth. He was quite eager to hear about humanity, however.

Of course, an intelligence coup of this size was readily seized upon by the Air Force and immediately made to vanish. The whitewash was so complete that it took nearly twenty-five years before the American public uncovered the truth.

Brought to the Roswell base the same night IAM was recovered, Werner von Braun examined the disc at length. He penned his Mars project letter that same night for the eyes of President Truman only. He received a promise from the president that if indeed this creature proved to be from Mars, America would be the first country to set foot on the red planet.

MAJIC Clearance

The moment the Roswell saucer was discovered it was made to disappear in a complex dance of conspiracy “painting over” the incident. Until 1969 no one even suspected that the antiquated rumors of the Army Air Force recovering an alien disc at Roswell could possibly be a reality.

A new clearance—MAJIC—was designated for all information about the creature, craft and its technology, and full access was restricted to 12 people (including the president, Werner von Braun and other exceptional scientific personnel). The U.S. government lied, violated the Bill of Rights and even killed to protect this secret.

As Wild Talents entered the mainstream a year later, many scientists on the project became convinced the craft and its occupant were nothing more than a delusional Talent. The government, however, could not be swayed. The possibilities blinded even the most sober-minded intelligence officer. The U.S. had access to an alien being!

When IAM revealed himself to the public in 1969 as the creature who crashed at Roswell, there was an enormous groundswell of interest in the incident. Notable witnesses came forward, such as Major Jesse Marcel and Walter Haut, confirming the claims of the “creature.” Congressional hearings followed in the summer of 1971, sparking several indictments, including General Roger Ramey and the then-ailing Dr. Vannevar Bush—both members of MAJIC.

Werner von Braun was called to testify before a closed session of Congress, but was never indicted.

The Roswell “disc” now sits in the Smithsonian museum on public display. To date, IAM has never attempted to recover it.



The Soviet Atomic Bomb (1947)

With the assistance of a quartet of Talent Hyper-brains and an extensive spy network in the United States, the Soviets managed to detonate a Nagasaki-type atomic weapon in Tienmagorsk in August 1947. Seven of fifteen American Talents in the employ of the U.S. Army Air Corps detected the blast through remote sensing, and after a conference with the English and French prime ministers, President Truman announced the stunning news to the American people by radio broadcast.

The end of his speech was marked by a rather uncharacteristically direct threat: “Even now American scientists are pursuing larger and more devastating weapons of destruction to ensure the specter of fascism, which was so recently crushed, will never have the chance to rise again.”

Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania (1947)

Communist forces ousted the ancient monarchy of Rumania, replacing it with a Soviet puppet state, the Soviet Army occupied and imprisoned the rulers of Hungary, allowing communists to take control, and a bloody coup in Czechoslovakia backed by the Red Army destroyed the fragile post-war regime.

These events happened in such rapid succession that a furor arose in the west. A general call for a policy of “peaceful containment” was made by Secretary of State George C. Marshall and backed by President Truman—a firmer stance on the Truman doctrine. In protest, American ambassadors were recalled from Moscow for two weeks and American forces began a quiet build-up in Western Europe.

Truman was overheard muttering, “Maybe I should just drop one down the Kremlin’s chimney. . . .”

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IAM

Name: IAM (pronounced "eye-EM") AKA, possibly, Dr. Ian Michaels

DOB: Unknown

DOD: --

Height: 4'9"

Weight: 220 lbs.

APPEARANCE: IAM is a squat humanoid with pale olive skin covered in downy fuzz. Its eyes are almond-shaped with four lids. Otherwise, it appears to be an imitation of a simplified human body. IAM is fascinated with Eastern cultures and prefers to wear loose-fitting Japanese clothing.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: IAM is an accomplished scientist, capable of building extremely advanced technology (mostly odd biological machines) decades ahead of the human norm. In addition, it can produce a single "biological duplicate," a drone that drops off and is controlled by its main body like a robot. The biological duplicate is a much thinner and more delicate version of IAM's own body, and appears exactly like the description of the classic "gray" from UFO mythology.

HISTORY: IAM appears to be an alien that crashed in Roswell in the summer of 1947 -- but the government remains unsure of this assertion. While it did arrive in an "alien spacecraft," appears inhuman and seems to speak an unknown tongue as its native language, government analysts noticed several peculiarities. Most now believe IAM is not an alien at all, but a Wild Talent whose power has completely rewritten his existence. There are several strong indications that IAM came from Decatur, Illinois, not Zeta Reticuli III.

A nuclear scientist named Ian Andrew Michaels, known to be obsessed with the possibility of extraterrestrial life, disappeared from the base at Roswell the day IAM was discovered by the 509th Army Air Force. Michaels' wife and daughter had left him three weeks before, and the scientist was known to be depressed. Notes discovered at Michaels' home speculated on a hypothetical situation startlingly similar to the crash near Roswell in July 1947, down to the smallest detail.

IAM has constructed several working prototypes of "biological machines" for the U.S. government to study, leading to several breakthroughs in life sciences. Its most significant contribution was a wonderfully compact and efficient "oxygen/nitrogen producer/scrubber" utilized extensively by the Air Force in the space race. IAM has rebuffed requests by the U.S. government to "reactivate" its "ship," a 15-meter silver hubcap that sat in government storage in Nevada, gathering dust, until it was moved to the Smithsonian. Studies of the craft by Hyperbrains have revealed very little about it except that its technology is extremely advanced.

In 1966, after years in government custody, IAM began to deteriorate. Its research ground to a halt and its body began to die. Fearful of losing such an asset, the U.S. government tried several solutions. Psychologists recommended the "alien" be allowed to interact with other "disturbed" superhumans. Several American Wild Talents in U.S. custody were brought to Gafton Air Force Base in

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Georgia in the summer of 1967 and permitted to interact in a project codenamed JUNG.

The Talents known as the Red Scare, Old Glory, and S.A.M were placed in a carefully-constructed environment with IAM and monitored by dozens of scientists. IAM began to recover from its malaise and soon the group became inseparable. All in all, the experiment seemed to be a dramatic success.

On October 3, 1967, a visiting general from Washington, interested in utilizing the Talents as special agents in the quiet conflict boiling in Southeast Asia, was given a tour of the Gafton facility. When he was presented the group, he was stunned to find the entire camp operating under the delusion that four oil drums were the superhumans. None of the Talents at Gafton could be located, although personnel continued to insist they were present. Some sort of psychic power (most likely that of the Red Scare) had affected the entire staff of the camp, allowing the group to escape.

Over the next three years the Talents involved themselves in the turbulent 1960s. Old Glory and the Red Scare worked together to, as Old Glory put it, "stop the reduction of American freedoms and the influence of communism on the American state!" IAM and S.A.M. pursued their advanced science free from the prying eyes of the government.

At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, the team confronted police and fought alongside the protestors. Their televised clash with the Army's Talent "Team One" rode the headlines for months, and left four blocks of Chicago ruined. Nevertheless, the popularity of the rogue group grew as the actions of the American government in the Middle East became less and less popular.

Even the apolitical IAM seemed interested in the "human interaction" of the 1960s and consented to a taped interview on the Dick Cavett show in 1969. Its revelations, such as the "reality" of the UFO crash in Roswell, had an enormous public impact. Overnight the public began to rally around the "alien," insisting on its recognition as a visiting emissary from a foreign power. The public dubbed the strange Talents "The Odd Squad," and other less-famous Talents began to imitate their hit-and-run methods.

In a desperate attempt to increase his flagging approval rating, President John F. Kennedy officially recognized the "Odd Squad" as the first publicly-sanctioned, non-military U.S. super-team on October 5, 1972, and granted IAM diplomatic immunity as a "Visiting Emissary with All Attendant Privileges." The group acknowledged Kennedy's pronouncement by consenting to a single, uncomfortable-looking photo taken in 1972. Despite government offers of equipment and resources, the Odd Squad has kept its base of operations and its methods a secret.

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Greece and Turkey (1947)

Infiltrated with communist agents and full of poverty, famine and near outright war, Stalin sought to incorporate Greece and Turkey into his growing sphere of influence. While thousands starved, assassinations and bomb attacks rocked the fledgling government of Greece, less than two years after it had been freed from Axis control. In Turkey, two failed coup attempts were put down before martial law was declared.

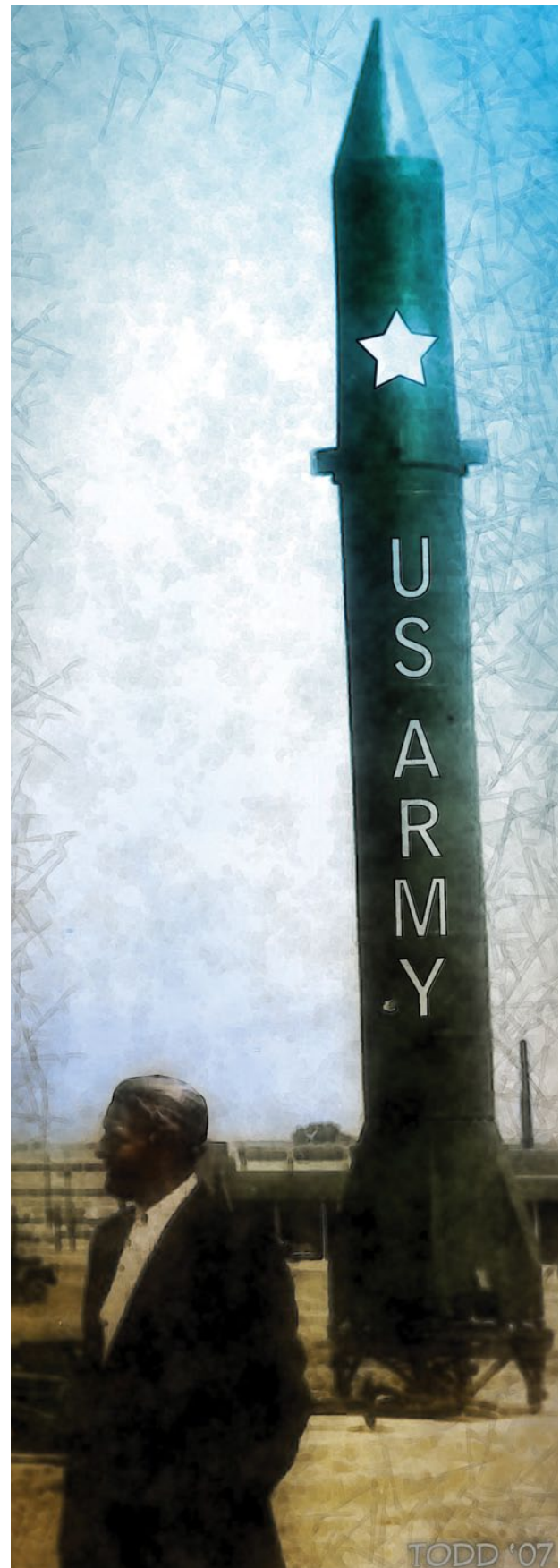
In March, President Truman called on Congress to aid these two governments and save them from “pressures and outside influence.” Congress approved \$400 million in aid to help them defend against communist guerillas.

The Brussels Treaty (1947)

In response to the growing threat of Soviet invasion, Belgium, Britain, France, Holland, and Luxembourg created an Atlantic regional mutual-defense treaty. America began exploring the possibility of uniting the nations of Western Europe as a staging area for a build-up against the Soviets. This treaty, signed in Brussels, Belgium marked the first new military alliance of Western nations since the Atlantic Charter.

Von Braun and the A-12a (1948)

With the assistance of American and German Hyperbrains, scientist Werner von Braun managed to launch his 122-foot tall A-12a rocket on a sub-orbital trajectory from White Sands proving grounds to just off the tip of southwestern Florida, covering nearly 3,200 nautical miles. In a secret report to the president, endorsed by over a dozen American Hyperbrains, von Braun projected that by as early as 1960 America could land a man on the moon. By 1969, von Braun envisioned accomplishing a dream that had been with him since childhood: putting a man on Mars.



Von Braun's project, code-named VENUS, was granted a huge active budget and militarized under the Army and Air Force. The project remained a secret, out of the public eye for some time.

NATO (1948)

In response to Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe President Truman established NATO on March 5, 1948, expanding the Brussels Treaty into a pan-Atlantic treaty. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established with sixteen member states—Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United States, Greece, Spain, Turkey, and West Germany.

Later—despite their geographical displacement—this would expand to include Turkey and India as well.

The 'Super' (1949)

President Truman approved plans for the construction of the "Super"—the hydrogen bomb—a weapon of incredible destructive potential. Twelve American Hyperbrains refused to join the project, protesting its construction due to humanitarian issues, but Edward Teller, one of the original Los Alamos scientists, gleefully set to work on it. His intense hatred of the Soviet regime and their seizure of his native Hungary fueled his passion for the creation of the weapon. By the winter of 1951, the weapon was ready for testing.

People's Republic of China (1949)

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was formed, and immediately made plain their stand on the West when threats began flying over the disputed island of Taiwan. The Chinese Nationalist Government—which had lost the mainland to the communist regime—had fled and formed the island nation of Taiwan a few years before.

Stalin promised "endless and most sincere friendship to the Chinese people." Two hundred tanks and thousands of firearms were shipped over the next eighteen months to arm the growing Chinese Army.

Chinese Ambitions

The Red Chinese government rapidly filled its ranks with Talents from the tens of thousands "created" in the conflict of World War II. They also immediately set about sending hundreds of "advisors" to the Soviet Union to absorb information on weaponry, building infrastructure and political training. When Wild Talents arrived, their utility in espionage seemed obvious.

Soon these two crossed—Red Chinese Wild Talents (often Hyperbrains) were sent to Moscow to absorb more than political zeal. They soon had formed a spy-ring operating out of the Soviet capital. This led in 1950 to the sudden disintegration of Soviet/Red Chinese relations. The two countries that had sworn eternal friendship to each other just a year before became sudden, bitter, hard-edged, rivals.

Abandoned by the Soviets and threatened by direct atomic attack from the U.S. in 1950, the Chinese backed down. As their economy floundered under poor management, it would be thirty-five more years before they would become significant world player again.

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THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS

Name: Dr. Emil Serber AKA The Destroyer of Worlds

DOB: October 1, 1922

DOD: -- (apparently immortal)

Height: 5'9"

Weight: 1,200 lbs.

APPEARANCE: Today, Serber appears much as he always did -- a thin, bookish man with unkempt hair, a stooping posture and poor coordination. Few realize until too late that this small man is incredibly dangerous.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: Serber's body has converted to a new life cycle based around heavy metals, odd biological compounds and other never-before-seen substances. His tissues are dense enough to deflect high-caliber ammunition and his metabolism is such that he can literally eat anything to generate energy. Serber's inhuman metabolism grants him a host of abilities: super-strength in the 20-ton range, invulnerability to normally fatal sources of damage (including radiation, kinetic weaponry, fire, asphyxiation and falls), as well as a super-dense biological structure. The source of these abilities is Serber's emission of gamma radiation; he's a natural radiation source on par with a sub-critical weapon core, emitting anywhere from 2,100 to 6,500 rems of hard radiation. Though he always emits a radiation signature, he can control how much he projects and also direct it, through unknown means. Coming within 200 yards of him for more than a minute without protection is fatal to most humans.

HISTORY: Serber was a young Hungarian scientist who was drawn into the TUBE ALLOYS project in England in the early 1940s, creating the first, tiny samples of plutonium in Cavendish laboratories in 1941. He was a skilled physicist, one of many fleeing Nazi oppression on the continent, and his particular skills were in wide demand in a Britain obsessed with national defense. He found both the work and the secrecy exciting and fulfilling, though the reserve evident in British culture left him cold.

In late 1942, with the merging of the American and British atomic programs, Serber and dozens of other British personnel were moved to the fledgling Los Alamos research facility. There Serber led the effort to measure the amount of fissionable material necessary to detonate the Fat Man and Little Boy devices. This exceedingly difficult and dangerous activity, often referred to as "tickling the tail of the dragon," involved moving two halves of a plutonium core close enough together to almost trigger critical mass.

Serber was excitable, young and a bit too eager to impress his elders. Though he produced prodigious amounts of work, he was often instructed to slow down and be careful by the likes of such scientific minds as Oppenheimer, Fermi and Feynman (who many saw as his American analogue). Serber loved America, and in 1943, with some string pulling from above, became a citizen. He devoted himself body and mind to the project at hand: winning the war for his new homeland.

On December 22, 1944, Serber was testing a core for projected yield. A backfiring truck distracted him and he dropped the core half, momentarily re-

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leasing the screwdriver that held the two half-spheres apart. They struck in a flash of ghostly blue-white light as the plutonium neared critical mass. Serber snatched the half off before it went critical, saving dozens of personnel nearby, but Serber himself was fatally dosed with nearly 2,100 rems of hard radiation.

Surprisingly, however, Serber did not grow ill. There was a day or two of tense waiting, and though Serber continued emitting enough radiation to kill several men, he remained healthy, alert and hungry. American Section Two scientists were alerted that Serber was a Talent.

After a month of study, at the recommendation of Oppenheimer, Serber was ensconced in a "hard bunker" at Los Alamos to continue his work. Serber was the ideal Talent to manipulate dangerous samples, since they now held no danger for him. Work progressed quickly with Serber's assistance, and he was present on July 16, 1945, in a specially-made vehicle, to witness the Trinity test.

After the end of the project, Serber soon realized the U.S. government had plans for him.

At first Serber was pleased to continue to be of help, but later, as it became clear his interaction with other humans would either be with men in bulky suits or dim faces through two feet of leaded glass, he became detached and confrontational.

By 1952 isolation had made Serber unstable, and he refused to work on American atomic projects. Also, his body seemed to undergo dramatic physical changes in late 1951 and his "Talent signature" vanished. Studies revealed he had joined the ranks of Wild Talents. Dramatic measures were necessary to keep him under lock and key. A team of U.S. Army Talents were moved full time to Los Alamos to "contain and interact with" him.

On January 9, 1953, Serber unleashed an incredible blast of gamma radiation, melting nearly nine feet of industrial concrete and killing two dozen personnel. Despite the best efforts of the Army, Serber escaped, unintentionally killing nearly 50 more people; his presence alone was fatal. Serber's mind had snapped, and his detachment was complete. If he could not interact with humanity because of his condition, humanity had to evolve.

Serber's various clashes with American Talents throughout the decades were extremely one-sided. Serber's powers far outstripped anything the government could launch at him, and he was responsible for the deaths of twenty-nine American Wild Talents. The government remained vague about both Serber's identity and the nature of his powers.

After his attempt to start a nuclear conflict in 1969 failed, Serber fled the U.S. and remains at large today. He considers himself a crusader for a cause, the survival of mankind. He has done the math: Nuclear conflict is inevitable and mankind must evolve or perish. He has decided, in his madness, that he will be the one that throws the switch to test man's mettle.

In a 1979 interview with Les Temps Modernes magazine, Serber was asked what would surprise the common man about him. He replied: "My optimism. I have high hopes for the world that's coming. All growth is painful, but I am a midwife here to deliver man to the other side of the Atomic Age."

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Wild Talents and Weapons Technology

Enormous breakthroughs in weapon technology occurred almost instantly after Wild Talents began manifesting in numbers. The new cadre of Wild Talent Gadgeteers were not limited by line of sight, or by an arbitrary number of devices. Their inventions were not based on real science and could operate on their own indefinitely, with or without the Gadgeteer's attention. They defied physics and this made them extremely dangerous.

The usually peaceful Hyperbrains found their hand forced by a sudden influx of physics-circumventing technology; most dedicated themselves to military development to prevent an uncontrolled arms escalation which would end in nuclear war—or worse. Formerly, Hyperbrains kept many of their more dangerous breakthroughs to themselves, but with the advent of Wild Talent Gadgets, they found themselves on a deadly treadmill. Every breakthrough they made simply put off some terrible event.

This uncontrolled explosion of one-off wonder weapons could not be tolerated by world governments for long. After a brief period of silence where the purchase of Wild Talent Gadgets could be achieved by sending away to an ad in *Popular*

Science, world governments went on a “Gadgeteer collecting” spree, bringing Gadgeteers under military control. Those that refused were informed of various acts and laws which made their activities, except in an exceedingly narrow range, illegal. Eventually, few Gadgeteers remained in the public eye who were involved with weaponry, and even those were monitored extensively. More than a few Gadgeteers were incarcerated due to illegal activities which fell under the broad umbrella of national security.

In the U.S., Gadgeteers were brought under the arm of URP (Unconventional Research Projects), a general skunk-works for all arms of the American military. Refusing a cushy and high-paying job in URP at the height of Cold War paranoia was a career-ending move. Few were stupid enough to refuse.

Rogue Gadgeteers with political sympathies became a problem in the early 1970s. One—Augustus Callon—even managed to use his inventions to become the absolute ruler of Costa Rica for nine days. Then he vanished without a trace from the Presidential Palace in the middle of the night and was never seen again.

Stalin Power Armor Mark 2 (1949)

In a show of force, during the Moscow Air Show, the Soviet Union demonstrated the “Stalin Power Armor Mark 2.” This mechanized suit of armor was approximately 25 feet tall (eight meters) and carried a single crew member in a tightly-fitting cockpit where each of the pilot's limbs roughly conformed to the layout of the armor's “limbs.”

Properly-trained pilots could operate this suit almost as if it were a giant extension of their own body, and its manipulators were capable of impressive finesse. As a demonstration during a Soviet ex-

ercise, a pilot pulled the roof off a car and carefully removed a human target from the wreckage without injuring him.

This huge armored suit allowed a normal human to fight on par with a superhuman, and was apparently mass-producible. Over a dozen were fielded during the demonstrations, some hundreds of yards apart from one another. American Hyperbrain analysts determined that the Soviets had discovered a Wild Talent who could violate the “Goldberg Science laws” which usually limited Talent technol-

Campaign Setting: Another Day on the Farm

Unconventional Research Projects, or “URP,” is a job like no other. Surrounded by some of the brightest and most dangerous people on the planet, with access to a seemingly infinite amount of materiel and goods, is more than enough to keep the average Hyperbrain on his toes. Many were forced to join to explore their gifts in the realm of legality, but almost all remain due to the engaging environment.

URP is housed in Vannevar, Arizona at a facility lovingly known as “the Farm.” Here nearly 200 gadgeteers, Hyperbrains and even odder superhumans make their home, working on solving the world’s problems (or causing more) one idea at a time.

URP maintains a “Go-Team” of a dozen or so of their best and brightest, ready to be teleported at a moment’s notice into the thick of things, to locate, identify and disarm rogue gadgets in the wild. Think of them as a superhuman bomb squad—except, in this case, the bomb might be a container full of nanobots raring to convert earth into carbon goo, or an experimental explosive that will simply erase every living thing in a 200-square-mile radius.

The URP Go-Team also maintains a “hit” list of the top ten rogue Gadgeteers and Hyperbrains loose in the world at any time. Enemy number one (also a former URP employee) is Dr. Diego Sandoz, the famed gadgeteer who held Dallas-Fort Worth hostage for 14 hours in 1971 before being shut down by the Go-Team. Since then, Sandoz has focused on eliminating Go-Team members with his inventions. So far the death count is 16.

ogy. American military advisors were immediately thrown into turmoil.

To make matters worse, the Soviets demonstrated a missile with an effective range of 3,000 miles. American reaction to both demonstrations was unreasoning fear—leading to a half-dozen articles postulating a Soviet atomic attack on the U.S., followed by an invasion of Soviet armored troopers.

‘The Serpent’s Head’ (1949)

In his State of the Union address, President Truman reassured the American people that the government was doing all it could to stand toe-to-toe with the Soviets. He announced American missile tests, exaggerating ranges and capacities, and stated that:

“An atomic attack on any American or European city will be immediately construed an act of war on the American people, and the U.S. Army in conjunction with the Air Force will immediately carry out a devastating atomic attack on that aggressor. Teams of American Talents stand ready and possess both the capacity and tools to carry out an instantaneous atomic attack on any point on the globe at a moment’s notice. Remove the serpent’s head and it is no longer a threat. The Armed Forces of the United States are a sword, poised to remove the serpent’s head with one swift blow.”

Despite his threatening language, Truman’s popularity continued to decline.

Ajax (1949)

On April 12, 1949 the first rocket-launched, man-made satellite was put into orbit by American teams working at the White Sands proving grounds. Called *Ajax*, the 1.5-ton radio transmitter circled the globe endlessly, crossing both Soviet and American territory twenty times a day. (Using

Technology in the 1950s: State of the Art

Computers

Based on newly-patented transistor technology, the first true computer was the UNIVAC 1, created by Remington-Rand Corporation. The transistor was invented by Rand employee Eli “The Brain” Watson, a former janitor who had manifested his Hyperbrain Talent in the midst of World War II. Though smaller and less efficient computing machines had existed previously, UNIVAC 1 was the first true digital computer.

Watson was a leader in advancing the fledgling computer movement, which had existed for some time in odd, out-of-the-way military programs.

By 1947, the UNIVAC 2, smaller than a coffee table, had both an RTD (ray tube display) and a keypad to directly input instructions. The UNIVAC and Watson’s rudimentary computer language, dubbed “Semaphore,” was picked up by think tanks and university programs everywhere.

By the end of 1950, the UNIVAC 3 was the world’s most popular commercial computer, and Watson’s Semaphore language had grown and changed into something far more complex than a number-crunching process.

Computer technology came to the public’s attention for the first time in 1951, when Watson dem-

onstrated his chess program—a computer opponent that could play chess with a simple visual display (mostly letters)—in a national television broadcast.

Watson’s technology would lead directly, in the coming decades, to the creation of the hand-portable computer by the Xerox corporation. (See page 274.)

Television

American television, which had existed as a fringe technology since the early 1930s, was given a shot in the arm in the late 1940s with the appearance of simple, cheap transistor technology licensed by RCA from the Remington-Rand Corporation. By 1948, many cities had full-time television stations. The preeminent power to rise during this time was the National Broadcasting Company. Allied with RCA, NBC snapped up fledgling stations across the United States, establishing the first chain of nationwide “affiliates” by the end of 1952. CBS and ABC soon followed.

The impact of television was quickly realized by the average man, and when RCA consumer-level television sets went on sale for less than \$100 a piece, demand soon outstripped supply. By 1952, nearly one in five American households had a television set.

‘Gadgets’

The 1950s were a time of nearly unrestricted growth in the creation and sale of “one-off” technologies, often called “gadgets”. With the advent of Wild Talents, the usual restrictions on Talent technologies had been lifted, and even the most basic “Gadgeteer” could create hundreds of items far ahead of current technology and sell them to the highest bidder. Many made a fortune selling handcrafted devices such as pocket-sized rebreathers, personal teleporters and more outre fare. It was not uncommon in the United States, for a brief period, for the affluent to possess small gadgets as a sign of wealth.

This ended with the “Murray Hill incident” (sometimes called the Murray Hill Massacre), a 1955 shoot-out with a group of criminals possessing a weapon which rendered biological material inert, reducing it to component elements. Though the device had been built for academia, its use in the murder of 23 people, including nine police officers, led to congressional hearings. Soon, the government was moving to curb the ability of the public to come into possession of unmonitored devices. (See page 240.)

Medicine

The Korean conflict brought the facts of Wild Talent medicine home to the people of the United States. Talents were no longer limited in their ability to repair or even replace the human body. During the 1950s Wild Talent doctors sent the normal medical world into a tailspin—no conventional doctor could compete with a person who could simply wish a disease away.

Of course, there were not nearly enough Wild Talents to service the world population. This situation would reach a head in the 1960s, when the 1961 doctors' strike brought America to its knees. But for nearly a decade, if you had the money, anything could be cured. (See page 252.)

Travel

Jet travel was moved to the forefront of conventional travel by 1955. Britain, America and Russia unveiled supersonic designs for passenger jets in the early 1950s. These vehicles were in common use by the next decade.

Another, more interesting form of travel also became a "fad" of sorts, much like jet travel. "Personal Transport," pioneered by Pan-American Airlines in the early 1950s, offered the affluent customer instantaneous transport anywhere on the planet. The price was incredible. Teleporters in

the employ of Pan-Am garnered exorbitant fees for the use of their powers, but for some—such as Howard Hughes, Clark Gable and Andrew Carnegie—there was simply "No other way to go!"

Though Personal Transport would grow to become a mode of travel used often, it would never reach the mainstream—mainly due to the space race. Teleporters of all ranges and capacities were swept up by world militaries to bolster the move into orbit.

Spaceflight

Both America and the Soviet Union saw space as the ultimate high ground. Hyperbrain analysts were certain anyone who could seize that high ground could rule the world.

America pumped enormous resources into technical methods of space travel, while the Soviets relied on a few rudimentary designs and instead focused on creating a race of space-capable Wild Talents. By the end of the decade, America was the undisputed winner of the "space race," but the Soviets were far from beaten. Their ability to "field" nearly one hundred space-capable Wild Talents by 1959 made the construction, movement and maintenance of their space facilities far more cost-effective and fast than America's program.

Weapons

The pursuit of nuclear technology waned over the decade as research into new, more destructive, more controllable and less residual technologies were pioneered—space-based weaponry.

On the ground, the average soldier saw a vast improvement in communications technology. By 1959, regular grunts were in radio contact with their commanders with a small backpack radio, while commanders enjoyed real-time black-and-white satellite images of the battlefield from space. Night-vision equipment (pioneered by the Nazis at the end of the war) became both cheap and portable.

Specialty weaponry such as sub-sonic magnetic sniper rifles, high-energy anti-tank beam weapons, and worse, became common front-line devices to stem the Soviet tide.

The Soviets had plans of their own. The "Stalin Power Armor Mark 2" disrupted the balance of power in Eastern Europe for nearly a decade. This 25-foot-tall armored suit put an average trooper on the par with a dozen tanks or Talents. Tens of thousands were mass-produced, replacing a vast majority of the Soviet Union's tank force. For a decade, the vision of a Soviet invasion of armored troopers seemed like a real possibility. (See page 240.)

Talent abilities, the Nazis had launched the very first artificial satellite, *Blitzen*, in the closing days of the war.)

Reports of the satellite spread in Soviet cities despite the regime's silence on the subject. The Soviet populace was terrified—America had beaten them to space.

First Suborbital Flight (1949)

Captain Lloyd “Indestructible Man” Moreland was launched on a 3,500-mile suborbital flight on July 4, 1949 on top of an A-12a rocket, ironically code-named *Icarus*, lifting off from a special Venus staging site at the White Sands proving grounds. Despite numerous technical problems, including a failure of two of the four parachutes on the capsule, the risky flight was a success and Moreland was unharmed. His capsule was recovered in the Gulf of Mexico by the U.S. Navy cruiser *Amarillo*.

To bolster the American psyche in a radio address, the president announced the successful flight but kept the location and identity of the occupant a secret. Due to the American public's reaction to the victory, President Truman expanded the Venus budget and authorized 14 more test launches.

French Indochina (1949)

After a briefing by two Hyperbrains set to study the political conflicts in the Far East, President Truman agreed to financial aid for the French forces in the internal conflict of the French colony of Indochina (later Vietnam), but, at their suggestion, refused to become involved militarily. The Hyperbrains insisted that Stalin's designs were in the Middle East and Western Europe.

Goaded by his own team of Hyperbrains, Stalin made a similar decision. Forty more years of conflict would focus on the Middle East.

Talents and Space Flight

It was an obvious fit: men who could do the impossible and an impossible task. In our world, military influence pushed for test pilots to “fly” these vehicles in a civilian agency, but in the world of Wild Talents the choice was clear. The project would be military; Talents and their amazing abilities would be the pioneers in space. Captain Lloyd “Indestructible Man” Moreland was the first, placed on top of 250,000 pounds of liquid oxygen fuel that posed him no danger.

Later, Wild Talents capable of space flight without a vehicle caught public attention. The first space-capable Wild Talent, Star, terrified the West with his abilities in 1951. Later, after the dramatic 1962 moon landing and the 1969 Mars landing by American Talents, the public lost interest. The limits had been pushed, and space flight became as mundane as conventional jet flight. From there, concerns turned back to Earth and the growing conflict between Russia and America.

By the late 1970s, space-capable Talents had escalated the Cold War into space, with dozens of orbital facilities loaded with classified weaponry, ready at the push of a button to end the world.

Project ARTEMIS (1950)

After the dramatic success of *Icarus* and intelligence pointing at Soviet intentions to enter the space-race, Werner von Braun received the budget go-ahead for his ambitious, classified Project ARTEMIS—a plan to land an American on the moon by 1960. Named for the Greek goddess of the Moon, the project planned to place a small space station in geosynchronous orbit of Earth, a second in orbit of

the Moon, and then to land a three-man team on the surface before the end of the decade.

Twenty-seven Hyperbrains were assigned to the engineering tasks needed to accomplish this ambitious plan, and over the next eleven months four more space shots—including the first orbital flight in 1951—made the American space program the envy of the world.

The Korean Conflict (1950)

In a surprise invasion, North Korean, Chinese and Soviet forces hurled back the fledgling army of the tiny republic of South Korea. American, British and French forces were immediately landed in South Korea to assist in battle. The U.N. condemned the invasion but, because China and North Korea were not member nations, these condemnations held little substance. Russian diplomats remained tight-lipped about their assistance in the conflict, though Soviet weaponry—including T-34 tanks and 60 suits of Stalin Power Armor Mark 2—were in use by North Korean forces.

To hold back the communist assault, the U.N. fielded over 2,000 Talents, including fifty Wild Talents, along with a vast array of conventional troops. But it was not enough; within three days Seoul, the capital, had been captured by Chinese-supplied North Korean troops. President Truman was certain this was the beginning of the Third World War. It became clear that two communist giants were manipulating the tiny country of North Korea and working their plans through it like a puppet. Truman considered various options including an atomic first strike.

Soon it became clear the Soviets and Red Chinese had stopped cooperating. On September 10, 1950 the Soviets withdrew their material and advisory support from the conflict, including their tanks and power armor. The Chinese and Soviet governments held a tense meeting as the war slowly turned against the north, but nothing changed.



TODD '07

On September 12, 1950, hundreds of Red Chinese scattered throughout the Soviet Union were arrested and jailed on charges of espionage. Similarly, the remaining Soviet advisors in China were imprisoned. It was not until nearly two decades later that the reason for this sudden reversal in “friendship” was discovered: The Soviets had discovered a Chinese Wild Talent spy ring operating out of Moscow.

As the conflict between China and Russia threatened to become a war, U.N. forces made a decisive move.

With General Douglas MacArthur’s famous Incheon landings, Korea was once again whole. North Korean forces were driven back past the Yalu River, and threats by the Red Chinese to the U.N. fell on deaf ears.

The Chinese, undaunted by the setbacks and eager for the rich peninsula, began gathering a vast force of men on the Yalu for a counterattack. After thirteen days of consultations with American Hyperbrains and at the request of General MacArthur, President Truman approved the use of the third atomic weapon ever detonated in conflict. The Hyperbrains made it clear that China would indeed attack Korea, and that if not ended quickly the conflict could drag on for years and had a 67% chance of leaving the peninsula split in two.

A single American bomber delivered the small, specially-made weapon codenamed SWORD to point 306, a mountain top just north of the Yalu in Chinese territory. The weapon detonated at 6:35 A.M. on October 29, 1950 with a small yield of five kilotons. It simply removed the top of the peak, and as far as is known was not responsible for a single casualty. However, the message was clear. Shortly thereafter, Chinese forces dispersed.

The mountain, which became known as “Flat Top,” marked the end of the Korean conflict and MacArthur’s crowning triumph. American forces returned to the United States as heroes once more.

Campaign Setting: The 50th Parallel

The Korean conflict is the first world conflict involving Wild Talents. As presented here it’s relatively short—but that’s not to say it can’t drag out, with a vacillating Washington, D.C. refusing the solution offered by the “Flat Top” incident in this timeline.

Wild Talents are few in numbers and shoulder a huge amount of the workload. They constantly move from point to point, countering Russian and Chinese Wild Talent forces, technology and more. The players could be anything from a rescue squad of Wild Talents to an intelligence force attempting to capture a Russian Wild Talent alive, to prove to the world Soviet involvement in the invasion.

In any case, the Korean War is the birthplace of Wild Talent-on-Wild Talent military conflict, and it offers unique gameplay opportunities.

Star (1951)

To counter American advances in space science, the Soviets unveiled their own artificial satellite: Star (Звезда), a Wild Talent capable of flight and survival in space. The Talent circled the globe fifteen times, his superhuman aura visible even in daylight, terrifying the American public.

In reaction to his declining approval rating, Truman formed a project to exploit space-capable American Talents called Project TUMULT. Despite vague public pronouncements, Truman’s approval among the American public continued in a sharp decline.

Soviet rhetoric was given a solid, terrifying form with the release of a propaganda film to the West, *Our Future in Space* (Наше будущее в космосе). This film outlined the Soviet program to “manu-



facture” space-capable Wild Talents who could, without spacecraft, traverse the void of space. The implication was clear: The West relied on technology, while the Soviets relied on the power of the human mind.

The *Nautilus* (1951)

Conceived by a team of Navy Hyperbrains, the keel for the first nuclear submarine, U.S.S. *Nautilus*, was laid by President Truman on June 12. Able to stay submerged for weeks and transverse the globe without refueling, the *Nautilus* held another secret: American scientists with project Venus were feverishly working on the A-12a1, a submarine-launched missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead 1,200 miles.

McCarthy (1951)

Senator Joseph McCarthy began his campaign of terror, blacklisting hundreds during his Senate hearings on “communist infiltration in American government and culture.” Dozens of American Talents were called to testify, including 14 American Hyperbrains who refused to participate in the construction of the hydrogen bomb. Despite their coherent arguments and obvious innocence, American sentiment briefly shifted to support McCarthy.

An unknown Wild Talent haunted the proceedings. McCarthy’s testimony was often scarring and seemed to cut to the very soul of those under his scrutiny. It wasn’t long before the world found out why: This mysterious Wild Talent, called “Mister X” by the committee and “The Red Scare” by the press, could read minds.

The terror of the McCarthy hearings would last nearly nine years and ruin hundreds of innocent lives.

TALENT VOLUNTEERS

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S.A.M.

Name: S.A.M. AKA Strength Augmenting Mechanics; Corporal Davis Pulaski

DOB: Oct. 23, 1923

DOD: --

Height: 12' 10"

Weight: 2.25 tons

APPEARANCE: S.A.M is a 13-foot robot constructed from the remains of American military vehicles. This artificial body, though intimidating, looks quite dated and is covered in patchwork repairs, giving it a botched-together look.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: The S.A.M. robot is immensely strong. Its armored shell (constructed from the modified remains of American armored vehicles) is capable of deflecting light anti-tank weaponry and is immune to machine-gun fire. Before his permanent transference to the S.A.M. suit, Corporal Pulaski was an accomplished Gadgeteer, but because of his new artificial status he lacks the superhuman Willpower to construct gadgets on his own.

HISTORY: Davis Pulaski was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin on October 5, 1923, to a wealthy family that owned the local lumber and paper concerns. He grew up in a sheltered house on the lake, tutored and pampered by an immense staff of faceless servants. Pulaski was a spoiled and distant child who tormented the household staff and managed by the age of nine to have them replaced six separate times. Later, as he grew older, his methods shifted from petty torment to sexual predation.

In the summer of 1941, Pulaski was discovered with an underage maid in the basement. The young girl had been beaten severely and Pulaski was arrested. The case gained statewide attention, and soon Pulaski found himself in the middle of one of the biggest scandals to hit the area in decades. The young man was given a choice by the judge: Join the army or work on a chain gang for sixteen months. Pulaski chose the army.

In the winter of 1942, Pulaski discovered his Talent ability with mechanical devices. His patchwork armor vehicles were widely sought after by the tank drivers of the U.S. First Army, and he gained a reputation as a miracle worker with machinery. For a time, Pulaski was content with interacting with "regular" people. When the war ended, however, Pulaski wanted more.

In 1950, Pulaski went to Korea with the U.N. forces. That winter he constructed S.A.M., a robotic body controllable at a distance. Pulaski's robotic alter ego soon became an important fixture on the frozen battlefields of Korea, ripping through armored columns and sending entire divisions scattering.

Before the conflict's end, army analysts began to notice Pulaski's deterioration. His body had grown weak, and physicals revealed an arrhythmia in his heartbeat. Pulaski was pulled off the line, but his thirst for battle drew him back. When the army confiscated the S.A.M. suit and placed Pulaski under protective custody, the young Gadgeteer concocted a plan to move to the S.A.M. body forever. His psychotic disassociation from humanity, something evident in him from youth, had only been exacerbated by his time in the robot.

By the time his plan was uncovered, Pulaski's human body was dead and the S.A.M. body was permanently switched on. Inside, Pulaski's mind took a final, irreversible shift away from the world of humanity.

(CONT'D)

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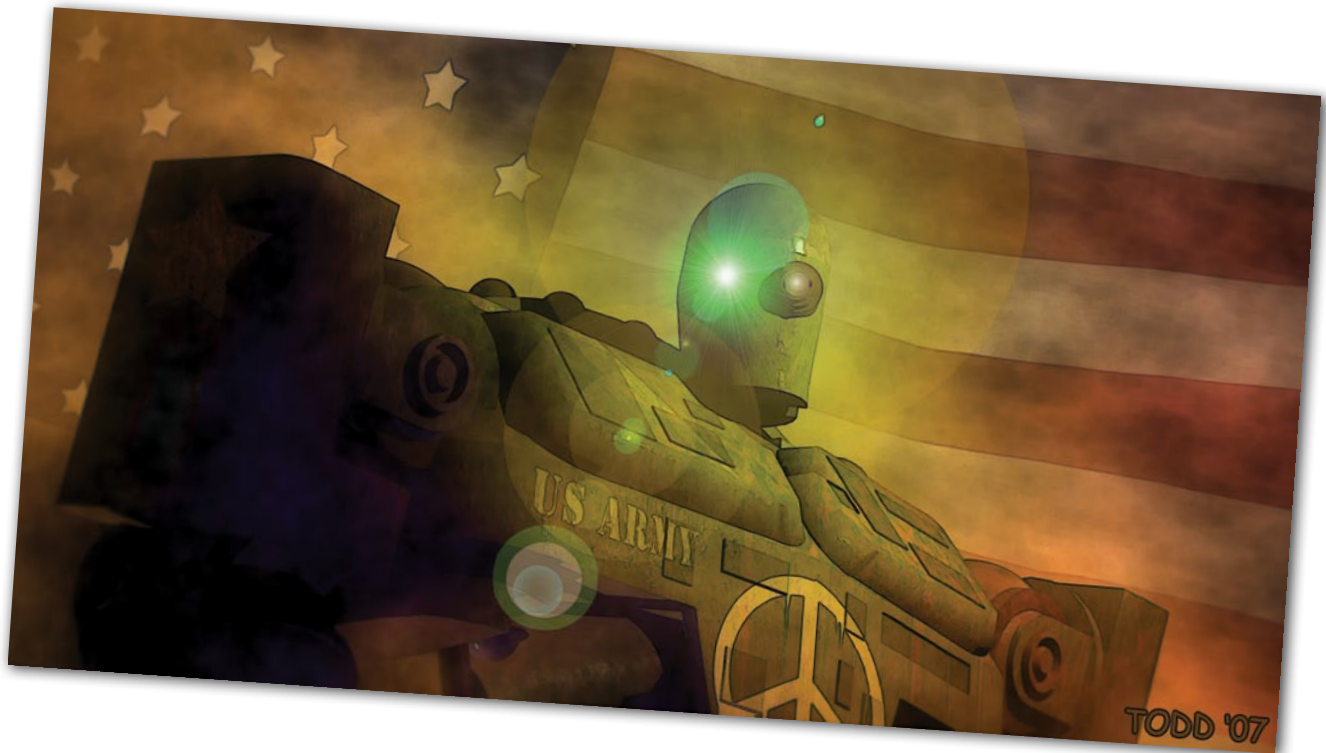
(CONT'D)

S.A.M. was returned to active duty, on a trial basis, to see if he could be trusted. He performed better than anyone could have guessed, going so far as to cross the Yalu River into China. But when word of S.A.M.'s actions against Korean civilians reached the U.S. command, he was immediately pulled off the line and moved to Tokyo to face court martial.

S.A.M. was sentenced to "life" imprisonment in Leavenworth federal prison, where he simply entered "stand-by" mode, shutting down for almost a decade.

He was reactivated for project JUNG, an attempt by the military brass to save the deteriorating health of the strange alien IAM. In JUNG, S.A.M. found like-minded individuals, Talents who had skirted the edge of insanity and had found an orbit of instability in which to exist.

With IAM's help, S.A.M. was reprogrammed in the summer of 1967 to "correct" his psychosocial problems. This rewrite caused a dramatic shift in S.A.M.'s attitude. Nothing of Pulaski now remained; instead a new and independent being was born. S.A.M. embraced the growing peace movement and became a "flower child". In 1968, S.A.M. replaced the white star of the U.S. Army on his chest with a peace symbol.



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THE RED SCARE

Name: Red Scare AKA Mister X

DOB: unknown

Height: 6'0"

DOD: --

Weight: 190 lbs.

APPEARANCE: The Red Scare is a nondescript man with deep-set eyes and dark, thinning hair. First appearing the early 1950s, the Red Scare has not aged normally. After more than 50 years in the public eye, his hair has only recently gone gray. Most believe another power besides his telepathy is at work.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: The Red Scare was the first Wild Talent to read minds. He could "read" memories, thoughts and feelings from dozens of targets at once, and had the ability to even "transfer" those concepts to a third party. He also had the ability to rewrite the memories of targets, though few knew it; that power was so insidious no one detected it until the 1960s.

The main problem with the Red Scare's powers was that he was easily influenced by the strength of the ideas he "read". The stronger the feelings, the more his own personality was "dampened" and changed. The effect of "reading" Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1951, for example, has remained with Red Scare now for 50 years, only slowly lessening over time.

HISTORY: No one knows who the Red Scare really is, not even the Red Scare himself. As far as he can recall his power has always been at work, but he remembers only back to the early 1950s and McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee, where his powers came to light. He became the star of the proceedings, startling people with his ability to read minds, something never before seen in Talents. He was McCarthy's secret weapon, and the Senator jealously guarded him from military interests and corporate offers. Unconsciously, the Red Scare had been swept in by McCarthy's derangement, and found himself viciously "exposing" those with even the most marginal exposure to "communist influence".

As HUAC collapsed following the exposure of McCarthy's various extramarital affairs, the Red Scare was "taken into protective custody" by the American military. He vanished from the public eye and was interred under the watchful eye of two Army Wild Talents known to be immune to his abilities. For 11 years, the Red Scare was used as an agent of interrogation by the military, and because of his "anonymous" status—his lack of identity—he was continuously denied due process of law.

By 1962, the Red Scare began to degenerate. His power seemed to lose its influence on others, and then it vanished altogether. In 1966, as part of Project JUNG, he was moved to Gafton Air Force Base along with Old Glory, S.A.M. and IAM as part of a military experiment to "cure" deranged Talents.

The experiment was a wild success, but not in the way the military had hoped. The group of Wild Talents escaped, and soon became the most popular subversive superhuman group in the United States.

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Telepathy's Impact

The Red Scare was the first publicly known telepath, and for a short while it seemed every world government was searching for Wild Talents with the capability. It soon became apparent that telepathy was, at best, imperfect. The telepath's thoughts, memories, ideas and opinions often affected the reading, and not all information recovered from unwilling targets could be trusted. In short, it was as subjective and unique as the telepath's own perception, and many, many telepaths suffered from mental problems.

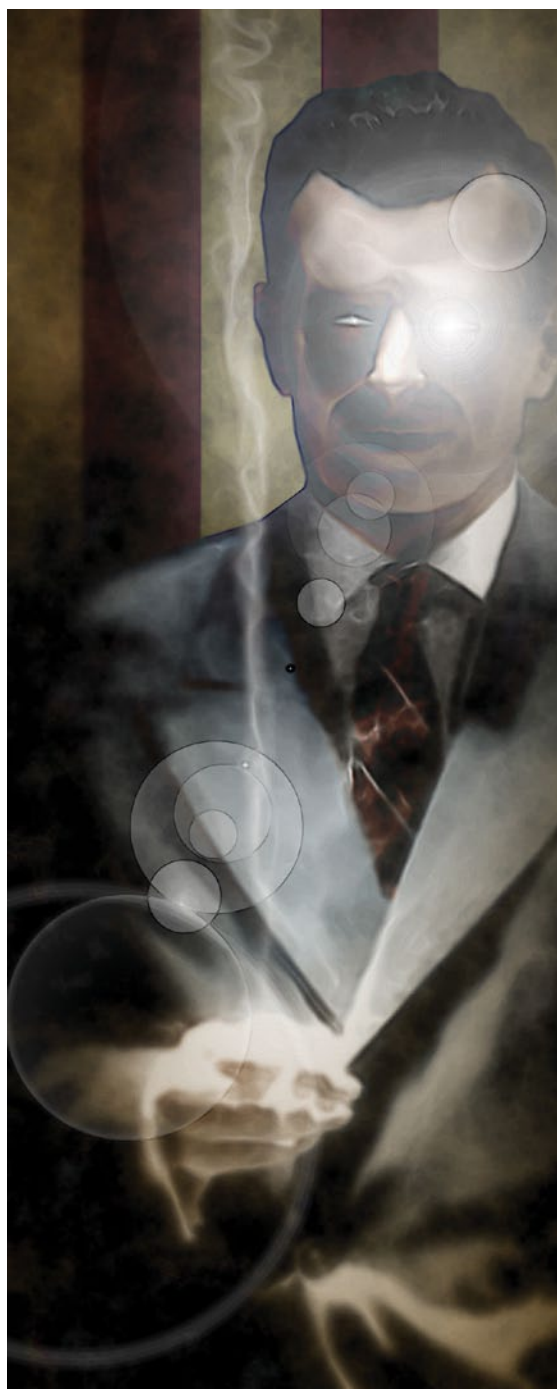
Despite several attempts to introduce telepathy into the American legal system, the case *Fuller vs. Wisconsin* brought the concept to the Supreme Court in 1967, which overturned the use of telepathy in legal proceedings altogether. The tool was deemed too "uncertain"—the equivalent of super-powered hearsay—and from that point on was consistently thrown out based on that precedent.

This did not stop the world militaries from employing telepathy on a large scale. Both the American armed forces and Soviet army and air force employ mind-reading, remote viewing and other mental powers to direct attacks, predict first-strikes and more. These uses, of course, are classified and are not known to the general public.

Sensationalistic rumors have persisted since the birth of telepathy that certain famous individuals were "controlled" by powerful, hidden telepaths (the claims implicated that the individuals included Stalin, Douglas MacArthur and others). During the late 1960s a series of shocking sex crimes in Kansas City were linked to a known telepath, who was later convicted. This brought with it a wave of anti-telepath sentiment.

Known telepaths have suffered as the average individual is both fearful and quick to assume the worst about any known telepath. By the 1970s, odd discrepancies in normal power distributions among

reported Wild Talents were noticed by the U.S. Department of the Army. These numbers indicate that many telepaths have simply chosen to conceal their powers altogether, to avoid the stigma which comes with them.



Wild Talent Medicine

Born on the battlefields of Korea, a new and dramatic form of medicine made its way back to America in the summer of 1951—Wild Talent medicine. The old rules that applied to Talent healers (that the patient be conscious, and not missing any significant portions of the brain or body) were well known to the American public from World War II, but when soldiers who were reported gravely wounded returned without a scratch on them, radio, newspapers and magazines jumped on the story.

Wild Talent healers could work incredible, permanent changes in injured patients, repairing any wound, no matter how severe. One Wild Talent (nicknamed “Silly Putty”) could duplicate a whole new body from a fatally wounded original! In the midst of war, the use of these powers were unquestioned; but back in the U.S., the entire medical establishment was up in arms. What use were doctors, nurses, drugs or hospitals in a world where a man only needed to wave his hands over your illness to heal it?

For nine and a half years, Wild Talent medicine existed in a legal gray area in the United States, culminating in the 1961 doctors’ strike that brought the nation to its knees. The medical needs of the U.S. could not be met by the handful of Wild Talent

healers, and the government had no choice but to act. The 1962 Conventional Medical Restriction Act outlawed the use of Wild Talent medicine in the U.S. without approval by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Specific approvals were permitted in areas of research, cosmetic procedures, and for those with permanent incurable deformities or brain damage. All else fell into the area of illegal “Wild Talent tampering” and was punishable by large fines and possible imprisonment.

Within a matter of months, most other Western countries created similar restrictions.

This did not stop Wild Talent medicine. By 1965 Switzerland, the Bahamas, Mexico and Peru had become havens for Wild Talent healers. These countries offered tax incentives, government investment in private enterprises, and various other perks to any Wild Talent healer of significant power to move there.

By the turn of the century, the richest men in the world paid 100 million dollars apiece for a new perfect body, drug lords had their face and fingerprints permanently changed, and gender reassignment was no longer a painful irreversible process. For the right price, nearly anything could be done to the human body.



Wild Talents and Law Enforcement

Talent jurisprudence was born on July 31, 1942, when the Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected Talent Louis Taft's appeal of his conviction for disturbing the peace by levitating to work. The resulting "Taft Laws" that were subsequently passed across the nation, restricting Talents from using their abilities in public without a permit, presented law enforcement agencies with a rather unique problem: How do you arrest a superhuman?

Most local and municipal police forces began employing so-called "Dud" Talents (Talents who had no obviously useful parahuman powers and therefore were not drafted into the military), using their ability to sense and neutralize the powers of other Talents. Normal police officers would then subdue and/or arrest Talent suspects. At first, this was used simply for violations of the Taft Laws, but it quickly became the default method for dealing with Talent violations of any law. For the duration of the war and into the immediate postwar period, this remained the preferred way of policing the ever-growing Talent community.

When Wild Talents first started becoming widespread in 1948, these police agencies were faced with a new problem. The canceling abilities of the Dud Talents did not work on this new generation of superhumans, forcing agencies to hire more capable Talents (mostly war veterans) who possessed a full range of Talent abilities and were able to enter actual combat with rogue and criminal Wild Talents. By 1950, Wild Talent police officers had mostly replaced the original Talents, and in most agencies these officers worked alongside unpowered officers, dealing with threats from Talent and regular criminals alike.

This remained the status quo in Talent law enforcement until 1962, when the case of *Thompson v. Texas* was brought before the Supreme Court of the United States. The defendant, an unpowered criminal, argued that the use of paranormal abili-

ties against him by Talent officers during his arrest violated his rights. His lawyers used a number of the legal decisions regarding the use of Talent abilities that led to the passage of the Conventional Medical Restriction Act as well as the violent Talent vs. non-Talent clashes during the recent Civil Rights Movement as precedent. The Court agreed, and ruled that in the absence of a known Talent or equivalent threat from a suspect, Talent abilities could not be used during the course of an investigation or arrest. The landmark *Miranda* decision two years later, further solidifying the rights of a suspect, cemented this restriction.

Most rank-and-file police officers welcomed these decisions; there had long been tension between "regular" police and the often far more capable Talent officers. In the wake of *Thompson* and *Miranda*, police agencies let most of their Talent employees go, and grouped their remaining Talent officers into special Talent-only units. These units, quickly nicknamed "Talent Squads" by the press, acted similarly to (and quickly replaced) the SWAT units that had sprung up during the violence of the Civil Rights era.

Talent Squad officers would be called in when regular police found themselves facing a Talent suspect, when an investigation indicated Talent involvement, or when a normal criminal presented a threat that regular officers just were not equipped to handle. This proved so successful that Talent Squads have remained virtually unchanged since their introduction.

MacArthur's Parade (1951)

General Douglas MacArthur returned from the conflict in Korea as a national icon. His decisive victory at Incheon and Flat Top propelled him to previously unknown heights of popularity, dwarfing even President Truman. Truman soured matters further in an off-the-cuff remark made during an interview with the *New York Times*, stating that MacArthur was often insubordinate. When MacArthur arrived in New York, a ticker-tape parade and nearly 60,000 New Yorkers turned out to see him.

Late in 1951, following a tour of the United States where he was hailed as a conquering hero, MacArthur threw his hat into the ring—he rapidly became the Republican Party nominee for president in the 1952 race. Adding World War II hero Dwight D. Eisenhower as his running mate only gave his bid more legitimacy and power.

Incensed and fearful of what he perceived as such a “rash and moody man” becoming president, President Truman decided to run against him.

Enewetok (1951)

The “Super” hydrogen bomb was detonated on November 1, 1951 at the Enewetok atoll in the Marshall Islands. Just ten months later, near the Ural Mountains, the Soviets detonated their own hydrogen bomb. The race for bigger and more destructive weapons continued.

By late 1952, American nuclear scientists had perfected a weapon capable of yielding nearly 100 megatons, an unheard-of force approximately equivalent to 6,500 Hiroshima-sized weapons. Such a device was never constructed however; instead, smaller, more surgical weapons were pursued.



The Race (1952)

After a particularly bitter presidential race, Republican candidate Douglas MacArthur defeated incumbent Democrat Harry Truman in a landslide, becoming the 34th president of the United States. MacArthur devastated Truman on November 4, 1952 with more than 80% of the electoral vote and more than 70% of the popular vote. His vice president—and former chief of staff—Dwight D. Eisenhower placed them above reproach in an America with World War II still fresh in the public mind.

President MacArthur would lead America through its most prosperous—and politically dangerous—times.

Dienbienphu (1952)

Vietnamese forces soundly defeated the French army at the battle of Dienbienphu, effectively freeing Vietnam (French Indochina) from colonial rule. Nineteen months later, at Geneva, Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel, and French rule of the colony ended.

Mankind Conquers Space (1953 to 1969)

“In a world where anything is possible, nothing, ever, is certain.” Douglas MacArthur, 34th president of the United States, on “Talent Escalation” and the Cold War, January 12, 1957.

The Treaty of San Francisco and the SPTO (1953)

Japan officially ratified the Treaty of San Francisco on February 22, 1953, bringing an end to Japanese imperialism and transforming Japan into a democratic, independent state. The newly elected American President Douglas MacArthur was on hand in Tokyo to witness the signing, less than a month

after his swearing-in ceremony. MacArthur, who was revered as a conqueror and architect of the reconstruction by the Japanese people, appeared to them as a hero, and his appearance demonstrated that the United States valued a relationship with the new Japanese democracy.

In secret, by swaying the Japanese to join as well, MacArthur was forging the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States) treaty into something much bigger. Within the year, with the Japanese ratifying the agreement, the pact would be re-named the South Pacific Treaty Organization (SPTO).

Though Japan could legally have no armed forces save the Japanese Self-Defense Force, President MacArthur’s keen military mind saw the Soviet threat for what it was, and sought to create a Pacific counterpart for the growing NATO. Japan became a key lynchpin in the policy of “containment.”

Together, NATO and SPTO (pronounced “spe-to”) gave the United States an unmatched circle of worldwide military influence.

The Strange Death of Joseph Stalin (1953)

The Man of Steel, Josef Stalin, entered his 75th year in 1953, and strangely enough seemed to be thriving. Western spy agencies were certain some sort of Talent ability was at work, a healer or some technological breakthrough that must be responsible for his revitalization. Only three years before, Stalin was thought to be nearing death; he had difficulty walking long distances and was rarely seen in public. However, he reappeared on the scene in 1953 much as he had twenty years before, stolid, implacable, strong. Talk began to circulate that though his health had improved, his behavior had not changed; his paranoia, if anything, had grown stronger. Fear began to build in the Soviet elite of another purge.

Surrounded at all times by a detachment of Wild Talents of unknown power and ability, Stalin made the political rounds in 1953 as if he had another thirty years of power ahead of him—and then, just as suddenly, he vanished.

Stalin himself seemed to have been the victim of a purge, vanishing one day just as he had ordered millions of others to disappear. One day he was there, the next, gone. News from the Soviet Union was limited. Not even those at the highest levels of the Politburo seemed to know what had gone on, as a complex dance to grab power began. No body was ever found.

Control of the Soviet Union fell through two men's hands in a matter of weeks, leading to executions, random assassinations and bomb attacks as the struggle continued. Finally, with the death of Stalin's closest confidant (and rumored killer) Lavrenti Beria and the assassination of ex-general Nikita Krushchev by parties unknown, Georgy Malenkov became the leader of the Soviet Union.

Malenkov's regime was strangely brutal and progressive at the same time. He was a great believer in space exploration and the production of consumer goods (as opposed to the Soviet obsession with industrial goods) but was wholeheartedly opposed to nuclear escalation, and saw the threat of world annihilation as very real.

Within a month, the Soviet Union stabilized under Malenkov as his opponents were executed, sent to gulag or censured. Malenkov called for the Soviet Union to strive in all things to surpass the West, and that a war of the will was at hand: Soviet orthodoxy vs. Western greed. Only a truly enlightened Soviet people could survive, and win.

***Spirit* (1953)**

The American space program launched the largest vehicle ever propelled into space, the *Spirit 1*, on June 5, 1953, and followed it 24 days later with the identical *Spirit 2*. Talent astronauts broke

Campaign Setting: Proxy War

Though it was deeply classified, the Cold War in Southeast Asia heated up in the 1960s. Russian, Chinese and American Wild Talents tangled in the supposedly stable countries of Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

American analysts feared a Soviet countermove to SPTO and a Far Eastern equivalent of the Warsaw Pact; the Soviets and Chinese feared American alliances in the smaller, Southeast Asian countries. Murder, sabotage, political assassination and espionage were not only common in these countries, they were nearly the basis of their respective economies. While the spy conflict in Eastern Europe remained one step below the public's perception, many noticed how "hot" the Cold War was becoming in southeast Asia, even though both sides remained tight-lipped on the matter.

Players can take the role of Western spies fighting a proxy war for their political ideology, while dodging bullets and powers bent on destroying them in the jungles of Southeast Asia.

space endurance records as the two vehicles rendezvoused and were permanently connected in an orbit 219 miles above the Earth on August 1, 1953. Together, they could support a crew of twelve for months at a time.

Spirit was announced to the public a month later as the first manned space station. The American public was ecstatic, and as information was slowly released to the public touting the achievements of the militarized space program, interest in space travel soared. Overnight, "astronaut" became the dream job of nearly every American grade schooler.

But not all that was going on at Spirit was for the good of mankind. Tests were under way at the request of President MacArthur to test the feasibility of launching nuclear payloads from space. Other war applications were being actively pursued, including space-based high-energy weapons, directed kinetic attacks and less savory things.

A rotating roster of American space pioneers traveled to Spirit in an ever-growing cycle as Werner von Braun took his first step towards realizing his childhood dream, the conquest of the Solar System by man. Blinded by his dream as he once had been by the Nazi regime, von Braun believed that mankind's expansion into space could forgive any transgression, even weaponizing space.

The Baghdad Pact (1954)

Fearful of the growing power of their Soviet-allied neighbors, Iraq found common ground with the United Kingdom and the United States, forging the Baghdad Pact in 1954. The Western powers feared a Communist "spill over" from Iran, and sought to stabilize the region into clearly definable regions. King Faisal II feared rumors of a coup reported to him by his Talent advisors. He whole-heartedly asked for British assistance to cement his position, and soon British troops and American equipment and advisors began to arrive in numbers in Iraq.

An immediate Soviet troop buildup began on the border, including 2,200 Stalin II power armor troopers and nearly 1,000 Iranian Wild Talents. But after a few tense weeks of a standoff, the situation stabilized. For now, the Cold War remained cold.

Reelection (1956)

MacArthur and Eisenhower were reelected in a landslide, obliterating their opponents in the most one-sided election result in decades. Adlai Stevenson and his running mate Estes Kefauver failed to gain even a modicum of public support. Caught in

the middle of an ever-escalating Cold War, where the Soviet Union was actively maneuvering for control of the Middle East and America's oil, Stevenson's campaign for peace was a horrible disaster.

MacArthur and Eisenhower—the generals who had brought victory against the Japanese in the Pacific, the communists in Korea, and the Nazis in Europe—found themselves back in office without even trying.

The Soviets in Jordan (1957)

It was long known that King Talal of Jordan was mentally ill, and the death of his son Hussein just days after his crowning was considered by all an act of political assassination. In 1957, after exchanging envoys, Talal entered an alliance with the Soviet-backed state of Iran and was quickly brought into the Soviet fold. American advisors attempted several abortive meetings with Talal, and when that failed the U.S. considered military options, but before they could act it became clear the Soviets had moved into Jordan in force.

Two hundred and twenty Soviet Wild Talents were "detached" to the Jordanian defense force to "prevent occupation by exploitive Western governments."

In response, American advisors already in place in Syria were increased in number, and several NATO Wild Talents of significant power were moved to Damascus. A direct, tense phone call between the American and Soviet leaders ended abruptly, leaving MacArthur to remark, "We brought the damn Reds into this goddamn century, now they think they're in the driver's seat."

Soviet and American military forces remained on alert over the incident for a record 16 months.

TALENT VOLUNTEERS

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OLD GLORY

Name: unknown

DOB: unknown

Height: 5'5"

DOD: --

Weight: 140 lbs

APPEARANCE: Old Glory is hard to describe. His face seems to differ depending on who is viewing him at the time. Non-Talents who focus on him for too long often lose their chain of thought and find themselves flustered. He seems to be a man of slight build dressed in 18th-century American colonial regalia. He wears a saber, a flintlock pistol with an ammunition pouch and a powder horn, and a tricorn hat reminiscent of a Revolutionary War soldier.

KNOWN SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES: In addition to his abilities to distort perception and concentration, which seems to be unconscious, Old Glory is incredibly, insanely lucky. He has tripped over a curb seconds before being erased by machine gun fire. He's seen buildings with no history of structural problems suddenly collapse on his enemies. He's stopped a Sherman Mk III tank with a single saber strike, by hitting it just so.

It also seems that when he is unobserved, Old Glory can "ignore" obstacles that would otherwise keep him out, such as doors, fences and solid walls.

Though this claim has never been tested, Old Glory says his power is generated by "the American spirit." He doesn't know if will operate outside of American territory.

HISTORY: Patient #11351 was another in a chain of disturbed individuals brought to a Red Cross hospital in San Francisco in the months following the end of the Second World War. He had no name, no dog tags, no discernible injuries, but he was apparently an American; the doctor who admitted him to the hospital ship claimed he was dressed in Marine gear.

Despite his symptoms, which included violent dreams and panic attacks, the patient, who went by the nickname "John," was quite cooperative and even helpful to the hospital staff. John seemed to hold sway over other disturbed individuals, and on more than one occasion managed to "talk down" patients from dangerous situations. This ability was so profound that he was studied by Section Two with the belief he might be a Talent. No such power could be detected.

By 1946, John was living in the hospital as a handy-man and helper. It was during the fall of 1946 that his alter-ego came to light. During this time, the newspapers reported several thwarted muggings by an individual dressed in "a Revolutionary War get-up" in the San Francisco area. These culminated in a November 1946 vigilante attack on six bank robbers in front of authorities. Witnesses reported that the vigilante leapt "from car top to car top" and landed in the convertible that was carrying the criminals. He managed to disable them while successfully steering the car-with his foot-away from several innocent bystanders. When the car came to a crashing halt at sixty miles an hour, every passenger landed unhurt in a delivery of topsoil that just happened to be present at the scene.

(CONT'D)

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(CONT'D)

After a tense standoff where the mysterious individual was assured he would be allowed "due process of the law", John voluntarily surrendered to authorities, cooperating fully—even happily—with the police.

He called himself "Old Glory" but refused to acknowledge any history before the incident with the bank robbers. He was remanded to the custody of the San Francisco Home for the Criminally Insane in the fall of 1947. By then other Wild Talents had come to the attention of the military, and Section Two was actively searching for more.

After a second examination, Old Glory was remanded to military custody in December 1947. There he was studied at length by military scientists as a classified oddity. Though he was cooperative and even eager to help American scientists, he could tell them little of his abilities. They just seemed to work. Even worse, he routinely escaped from secure areas, often turning up miles from the facility, invariably in the prevention of some crime or injustice. This went on for three years, until a clever doctor, Dr. Emil Osterbruck, realized Old Glory was true to his word.

After several conversations with the Wild Talent, Osterbruck convinced Old Glory to restrict his "wandering." The increased security had been a mistake; all they needed to do was ask.

While in custody Old Glory was exposed to constant anti-Communist propaganda, which, of course, he fell for, hook, line and sinker. Old Glory's politics, obsessed with all things American, found an implacable enemy in the Soviet Union.

Old Glory remained unchanging throughout nearly twenty years of incarceration. He was upbeat, eager and cooperative, and seemed to enjoy both showing his abilities to examiners and exploring their limits. In 1966, he was moved to Gafton Air Force Base as part of Project JUNG, an attempt to "jump-start" several Wild Talents in American custody who seemed to be deteriorating. Old Glory was seen as the key to the project's success, a prime for the pump as it were.

Old Glory did indeed revitalize the dwindling powers of the others, and found like-minded beings in the group which would become known as the Odd Squad.

Old Glory became the de facto leader and spokesman of the Odd Squad, and he seems to have unquestioned authority over the others, though no one really knows why. He is obsessed with "protecting the American way of life" and fighting the "enemies of the Constitution." In short, he seems too altruistic and gung-ho to be real, but he wears his beliefs on his sleeve and is not capable of deception. That alone makes him extremely dangerous.



The Race War (1958)

Growing unrest for equal rights in the South led to a bloody confrontation in Mobile, Alabama, between the Teevees and large group of armed segregationists. The powers-that-be who sought racial separation—including the White House, which saw the matter as a non-issue due to the growing Soviet threat—initially believed that the “Battle for Mobile” would cause the public to turn against the idea of integration. Instead, it was a public powder keg. It was also thought, naively, that the unrest would simply end. Instead it escalated. Within a week, the National Guard and Army Talent Team Two were moved into Mobile.

After the public murder of two members of the Negro Defense League (a small team of black Talents) was caught on television, the issue exploded all over the world. These two Talents were gunned down while surrendering to Army troops that appeared to be siding with the segregationists. Protest at the U.N. by the Soviet Union over the “unconscionable treatment of America’s citizenry by an unjust government” infuriated and humiliated MacArthur, and the major networks turned on the White House for the first time.

After the death of nearly 40 people and the burning and looting of millions of dollars of real estate, and with troops moving into the streets of nearly every major city in the United States, the “Battle of Mobile” came to an end. The invulnerable MacArthur presidency had suffered a crippling blow. It had focused too much on the space race and the Cold War, and not enough on domestic issues. President MacArthur assigned a task force to investigate the issue, but public opinion in all places except the Deep South had already turned. The brutal execution of the two men by federal forces on the national news was ingrained in the public’s eye, and there was no going back.

Eisenhower, who had supported MacArthur unwaveringly, saw his presidential hopes in trouble.

President Humphrey (1960)

Hubert Humphrey, a Democratic Senator from Minnesota who had once pushed the Democratic Party on the issue of human rights, stepped forward to take the Democratic nomination for president. From there his ascent was unbroken, as he devastated Eisenhower in the 1960 election.

Humphrey played the race issue up for all it was worth, pointing out the shortcomings of MacArthur's segregation policies, and promised grand reform on par with the Emancipation Proclamation. President Humphrey was sworn in on January 11,

1960 with great public fanfare, and made good his promise by enacting the Civil Rights Act of 1960, outlawing segregation in the United States forever.

Humphrey found great support in the Teevees who served as impromptu peacekeepers at hundreds of schools in the South as integration began. The Teevees, who had worked diligently in the South for nearly a decade on relief missions during various natural disasters, found most Southerners—even those who were pro-segregation—hesitant to use violence to oppose the issue.

Within four years integration was complete in most areas of the U.S., and was judged an enormous success. By 1964 President Humphrey was given the nickname “Honest Hubie,” a reputation which would serve him well in the coming decades.

Campaign Setting: Equality

From the early 1950s a deep-seated resentment of racist segregation in the South was building in the younger population of the U.S., fueled by both the pig-headed views of the MacArthur administration and by Hyperbrain orators and thinkers. Near the end of the 1950s powerful Wild Talents of various ethnicities were drawn to the South, to fight for equal rights and to put an end to segregation forever.

Violence, both superhuman and otherwise, was commonplace, building to the “Battle of Mobile” where the U.S. Army actively took sides in the conflict. It destroyed the White House's credibility on the race issue and left the up-to-that-point unblemished MacArthur/Eisenhower administration in shambles.

Players can take the role of Wild Talent Equal Rights activists bent on equality for all Americans, regardless of race, religion or sex, or Teevee regulars attempting to enforce the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1960, preventing acts of violence before they happen. In either case, the turbulent early 1960s are a setting ripe with intrigue, violence, heroism and changing mores.

The First Men on the Moon (1962)

Captain Jason “Skip” Clark became the first human to set foot on the Moon on December 22, 1962. The Moon lander *Artemis 1*—nicknamed the “Crawler”—dropped in a 17-minute descent the world had been waiting for since the announcement of the space station America, set in lunar orbit 19 months before. Along with Clark were two other Talents, First Lieutenant Douglas Timony and Lieutenant Mark Potorov (a Russian-American!). Captain Clark spent nine hours on the lunar surface, performing various experiments. President Hubert Humphrey congratulated the astronauts on their dangerous endeavor from the White House by telephone.

Clark's first words on the lunar surface, impromptu as they were, were rebroadcast hours later to rapt audiences around the globe: “We came in peace for all mankind.”

The American victory, at least in this chapter of the space race, was complete. The Soviets, focused as they were on Talent space flight, could not compete technologically.

For now, the race for space was over.

Space Escalation (1964)

Despite attempts by the Humphrey White House to come to the terms with the Soviets on a Space Treaty, intelligence pointed towards continuous Soviet movement in orbit and beyond.

The Soviet Union had taken a dramatically different tack than the U.S. in space travel. From the beginning they relied upon Wild Talents above all other methods to get into space. From 1950 on, the Soviet Union knew it could not compete with the West in production, and instead turned its attentions towards the power of the human mind. It was only later that the United States realized that Wild Talent abilities were so useful in space travel.

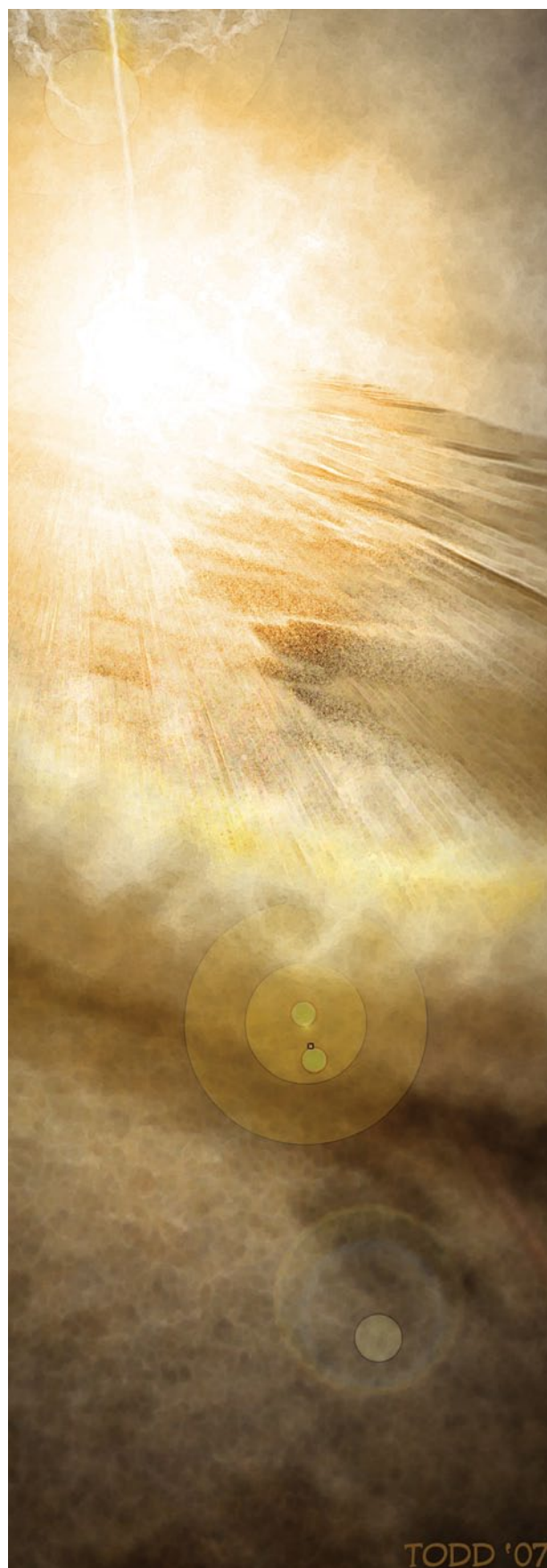
The focus of the Soviet project was Звёздный Горо́док, “Star City,” a huge facility outside Moscow which selected subjects with Talent powers as young as 13 and raised, trained and prepared them for a life as conquerors in space.

By 1963, the Soviets led the world in space-capable Wild Talents, men and women who could leave the atmosphere under their own power and survive. With the boom in space escalation in the mid-1960s, the Soviets moved huge payloads and orbital weapon platforms into Earth orbit through teleportation and odder means. Rocket technology, for a large part, was abandoned except for Russia’s ICBM deterrent.

The Russians focused on Earth and near-Earth orbit—few of their Wild Talents could wander much further. By 1962 with the American moon landing, the Russians realized their plans for the Moon and Mars were hopelessly out of date.

From that point the Soviets focused their efforts on defense, arming their orbital platforms, and preparing drop-teams of space-capable Wild Talents that could instantly strike at select targets around the globe.

The Soviet Wild Talent space effort had led to the testing in 1963 of a “kinetic weapon” in the isolated reaches of Siberia. This weapon, nothing



TODD '07

more than a four-ton space rock accelerated by Soviet technology to incredible speeds, hit Siberia with the equivalent force of 1.4 megatons. This terrified the American military for various reasons; the Soviets could launch a concerted non-nuclear attack on various points of the globe, decimating huge areas with no residual radiation. This weapon also circumvented various nuclear-weapons treaties.

Protests by the U.N. failed to faze the Soviets. Talks broke down in 1964 when America refused to cancel its ambitions for a permanent moon base

in exchange for the Soviet Union pulling back from near-Earth-object testing.

President Humphrey was a prudent, broad-minded man, and saw the danger of Soviet sneak attack now as more real than ever. More money, support and personnel were granted to the U.S. space program. Within two years America had tested its first kinetic weapon launched from the Moon. America 2, the newly-minted ground station, was armed with a “rail gun,” a weapon that could launch a ton or more of material at incredible speeds to hit precise targets on Earth. Humphrey told the American people: “Now, not only does America hold the moral high ground, we also possess the actual high ground. We will not make a first strike, but we will make the last one.”

Teleportation and Space Travel

Large payloads began moving in the Earth system and beyond in the late 1960s, transported instantaneously by the power of the human mind. America had more than two dozen Wild Talent teleporters, some of whom could transport tons of payload over enormous distances. One could move objects more than 40 million miles (as long as line of sight was maintained) at a time. This classified teleporter was responsible for placing the Vanguard construction ship in orbit of Mars in 1964, as well as moving the Mars crew to their target five years later.

Other teleporters could “only” move smaller payloads from the Earth to the Moon.

This dedicated teleportation service did things like deliver supplies to the Moon and Mars, reduce fuel payloads by giving space vehicles a “head start,” and remove the need for conventional rocket launches. By 1966, almost all “liftoffs” from America’s classified space program were made in the blink of an eye. The brief age of Werner von Braun’s Venus rockets had come to an end.

The Collapse of the U.N. (1966)

A general call for the end of space armament was presented to the Security Council of the U.N. in 1966. Seventeen nations, including two charter nations (France and China) called for the cessation of directed kinetic weapons testing, but the Soviets and America could not back down.

Many considered this the end of the U.N. as an effective governing body. Meetings continued, but America withdrew material support to the U.N. in light of their negative comments towards its space policy. Eventually the U.N., suffering from financial problems and a lack of material forces, was dubbed the “the most expensive bit of nothing in the world.”

To most, the U.N. was seen as a waste of money and resources. Eventually, even humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross were forced to deal more with individual governments—simply to get things done—than with the U.N.

Technology in the 1960s: State of the Art

Computers

Computer technology hurtled forward in the 1960s, driven by superhuman minds in a way never seen in our world. By 1960, huge projects were under way both in the Soviet Union and the U.S. to create "artificial intelligence." While Gadgeteers had successfully created "automatons" which exhibited convincing mimicking of consciousness, few believed these beings were the breakthrough all sides were looking for. Hyperbrains were turned to the task.

After nine months, Eli "The Brain" Watson unveiled his creation, Adam, on July 12, 1961 to a select group of military at Sandia National Labs. Adam was the size of a charter bus, could "see and hear" through various remote control drones, and was in all aspects Watson's "child". This artificial intelligence spoke, conversed and even held grudges. It is the first confirmed artificial intelligence known (though the Soviets would later dispute this). The creation of the quantum technology necessary to mimic the human mind was a huge drain on national resources, and though Watson had achieved his goal, few could see an everyday application to such expensive technology.

On other fronts in computer technology, the computer became a standard sight around the workplace. By 1964, most banking was conducted on computers. This gave the birth to a huge expansion in the "personal credit" boom which was already under way.

Television

Color television (first seen in 1938) became a national fad in the U.S. in the summer of 1961. By 1965, nearly every family possessed a color television set. New transmissions technology allowed clearer pictures and fewer carriers, and also made it possible for thousands of smaller television channels to spring up.

In 1965, CBS television began selling a new service called "cable." In select markets, TV owners could choose to pay a small fee for a direct feed over telephone to their televisions of entertainment—including the broadcast of various feature films uncut and uninterrupted by commercials.

Television rose so quickly, and became so prevalent in less than a decade, that the children born in this era are known ubiquitously as the "TV Generation."

'Gadgets'

After the crackdown on Gadgeteers and Hyperbrains by world governments, a robust black market popped up in smaller countries around the world, where older, small gadgets were sold for ridiculous sums to the rich or the twisted.

Hundreds of thousands of gadgets created in the time before the crackdown circulated the globe. Most were harmless; some were not. Despite the best attempts of world police forces, the flow of illegal gadgets continued.

Belgium in particular became a hotbed for the sale and resale of gadgets. Though the country accepted the international law that restricted the creation of gadgets, it ratified no laws restricting their purchase, sale or possession.

Crimes committed with gadgets continued, and continued to be sensationalized by the press, though they accounted for a tiny percentage of total crimes.

Medicine

The United States' Doctors' Strike of 1961 brought an end to the unrestricted practice of Wild Talent medicine in the United States outside of special circumstances. By the mid-1960s it was common to find a competent and registered

Wild Talent healer in nearly any trauma center or ER in any metropolitan area of the U.S.

Unfortunately, there were never enough Wild Talent healers to go around. The average Wild Talent serving in such a capacity lasted less than two years, due to stress, anxiety and overwork.

It was also during this decade that the first killing of a Wild Talent healer occurred. Morris J. Cavendish—a healer who could sometimes effect a complete “restart” of any biological system (allowing, for instance, an exhausted cancer patient a second chance to fight the disease)—was murdered in front of his home in the Bronx by Melvin Rasucos on May 1, 1966. Rasucos blamed Cavendish for the death of his daughter the year before. Killings like this became a disturbing trend in the national news, and led many Wild Talent healers to take up residence in other, less restrictive countries where they could be paid exorbitant fees for their abilities.

Travel

Boeing unveiled its “strata-cruiser,” an enormous 300-passenger jet that could travel in excess of Mach 1, on January 1, 1962. By the end of the decade, nearly everything in the sky was moving faster than the speed of sound.

Though flying cars (often

represented in comic books and movies) were on the drawing boards of many companies, they never arrived. Instead, America became even more obsessed with the “standard” automobile. New amazing designs turned up on a monthly basis, using breakthrough technologies like fiberglass, carbon-fiber and titanium. Mass-produced by Wild Talents, cars took on a whole new importance in the 1960s. Car telephones also became a standard feature.

Military technologies in travel far exceeded those of the civilian market. Jet packs became a battlefield reality for select troops, as well as various gadgets allowing short-range teleportation.

Spaceflight

The 1960s saw a huge explosion in the obsession with spaceflight. Soviet moves in orbit and the birth of kinetic weaponry drew the rapt attention of the entire globe.

With the successful landing of Americans on both the Moon and Mars by 1969, many believed the space race was over. However, the vast resources of both world powers were focused on constructing a network of weaponry in orbit and beyond. By the end of the 1960s space shots were so commonplace that the average citizen didn’t even bat an eye.

Weapons

Weaponry took huge and disturbing leaps in random, more destructive directions. Nuclear-isomer explosives brought incredible explosive power into the hands of the average infantryman for the first time. These weapons produced enormous explosions with no radioactive fallout, and they were stable and safe to handle.

Bio-weaponry also took a disturbing leap into the mainstream. Both the Soviet and American programs produced so-called “checkmate” bio-weapons, last-ditch diseases meant to wipe out the other side in case of a sneak attack.

Nanotechnology was also born in the 1960s. Soviet research into tiny machines led to the 1967 Almetevsk “outbreak.” Though American intelligence caught whiff of something, it didn’t discover until the 1980s that self-replicating nanomachines consumed the entire town, including 286 people, in a seven-hour period. The Soviets prevented it from spreading with the last-minute use of a directed kinetic weapon.

American research into nanotechnology was much more careful, and focused on the problems of the battlefield troops—how to keep soldiers warm, fed and healthy.

Worldwide Life in the 1950s and 1960s

For the most part, life began to accelerate in “Third World” countries by the late 1950s. Soon enough, the largest cities in nearly every Third World country were catapulted forward in infrastructure to support the growing globalized economy. Large American firms like Coca-Cola and IBM made vast inroads into local sovereign governments, creating small “enclaves” in the mineral/labor-rich countries of the developing world. Within these areas, life mimicked American life down to the smallest luxury.

By the end of the 1960s, a network of first-class facilities existed in nearly every country on the planet, no matter how far flung.

Elsewhere in the world, in more established nations like China and the Soviet Union, work continued to outperform, out-produce and out-think the West.

Overall, worldwide, infrastructure changed, logistical inefficiencies corrected, and an increasing amount of cheap, work-relieving technological breakthroughs led directly to an increase in life span, wealth and quality of life in even the most backwards nations.

Life in the U.S.

The United States enjoyed a huge boost in prosperity in the early 1950s, which suddenly (and inexplicably to most) seemed in danger of complete reversal with growing racial tensions, brought on by decades of segregation, and a growing “counter-culture” movement. Despite several startling achievements, like the first moon landing in 1962 and the Mars landing in 1969, the American public’s eyes were firmly placed on the strife on the ground. This era marks a series of false starts into what most Americans believed was an ideal American future, always just around the corner.

Talents

As ever, Talents were an obsession with the American public. *Talents!* magazine enjoyed a huge circulation, and hundreds of newsreels, television programs and other publications focused on nearly all aspects of Talent life, much in the same way tabloids focus on celebrities today.

For the most part, powerful known Wild Talents were humanitarians—well-meaning, sometimes misinformed, famous figures known only for some superhuman ability. In a few cases, some Talents were publicized for the judicious (and helpful) use of powers for the public good. In far fewer occasions, certain Talents (most often unknown) were vilified for evil acts. Reports of the former at first outnumbered the latter, but as the turbulent 1960s continued to warp the culture in new and bizarre ways, authorities began to notice a growing amount of Talent crime—some of it neither political nor monetarily motivated, but simply deranged. As this threat grew in the public eye, the concept of Talents “policing their own” became an accepted part of American culture.

Crime

Crime continued on in American culture as it always had. Organized crime turned to Talents (many ex-military) to populate their ranks. The New York Mafia for instance, was said to have a Talent for every four members. This had the unfortunate side effect of drawing police Talent squads into the fray often, causing extensive damage to both New York and to police public relations.

Individual powerful Talents with a bent for the malevolent did exist, but in a world where a power can be parlayed into lucrative deals, few Talents found their minds turned to crime. Those who did

were either ill or simply evil.

Super-powered crime was not a commonplace occurrence in most of America, and instead was isolated mostly to major urban centers or other areas where large portions of money or other valuables changed hands.

Politics

American politics was a series of upheavals throughout this era. The seemingly unbeatable combination of MacArthur and Eisenhower found itself suddenly unseated due to the growing racial upheavals in the U.S., which they considered little more than a distraction. President Humphrey's election was seen

as a staggering and final defeat for the "hawk-like" politicians that had haunted Washington since the end of World War II.

However, Humphrey—confronted by the undeniable facts of growing Russian space armament—proved to be a hawk himself. The collapse of the U.N. in the mid-1960s led to a worldwide diplomatic free-fall which would not be checked for almost five years. In that time, nearly irreparable damage was inflicted in the Middle East, leading directly to the Soviet-American confrontation in Lebanon in 1971.

With the U.N. effectively a hollow shell, the world turned more and more to NATO and America for support against Soviet aggression.

The Gold Crash (1966)

In 1966 a plot to mass-produce gold using Wild Talent abilities was uncovered in Italy. Two Dutch transmuters, Wild Talents capable of permanently transforming the atomic structure of atoms, were converting dense metals to gold. They were prepared to sell them simultaneously at all points around the globe before they could be discovered.

They were caught before the plan could be enacted, but it led to a *huge* drop in gold, silver and platinum prices, a crash of unprecedented proportions. The price of gold dropped to \$19.17 an ounce, lower than the price of gold in 1910. This had disastrous effects on the American economy and led directly to America abandoning the gold standard in 1968.

The Peace Movement (1966)

A hugely popular movement grew in the United States in the mid and late 1960s. Known as "hippies" or "peaceniks," these individuals represented the counter-culture view that war and all weapons were evil, that mankind could choose to live in peace and harmony, and that world governments, nationalism and racism could be eradicated with nothing more than a change in point of view.

Various marches and protests against American and Soviet space escalation led to the chaos of the 1968 Democratic national convention. Following the violent protests and deaths that occurred in Chicago in 1968, the Peace Movement lost momentum and slowly fell out of the public eye. By 1973, the movement, which had no real organization, was little more than a handful of individuals scattered across the U.S.

Vanguard (1967)

Using advanced technology which allowed real-time faster-than-light communication, American Hyperbrains were able to construct an orbital base over the planet Mars in just two and a half years without risking a single living soul. Construction began in 1964 after a huge payload ship constructed at the space station America was teleported nearly 40 million miles to Mars orbit by an American Wild Talent teleporter observing the planet through the powerful Iris Dark Side telescope.

The base was built using fourteen remote robots controlled from Huntsville, Alabama. The signals that controlled them, which would have taken nearly 20 minutes to reach the red planet at the speed of light, were transported instantaneously by the odd quantum behavior of entanglement. Two particles of a dual-particle system were separated and contained in the transmitter and receiver. Spin applied to one *instantly* changed the spin of the other, no matter the distance, transmitting signals back and forth faster-than-light.

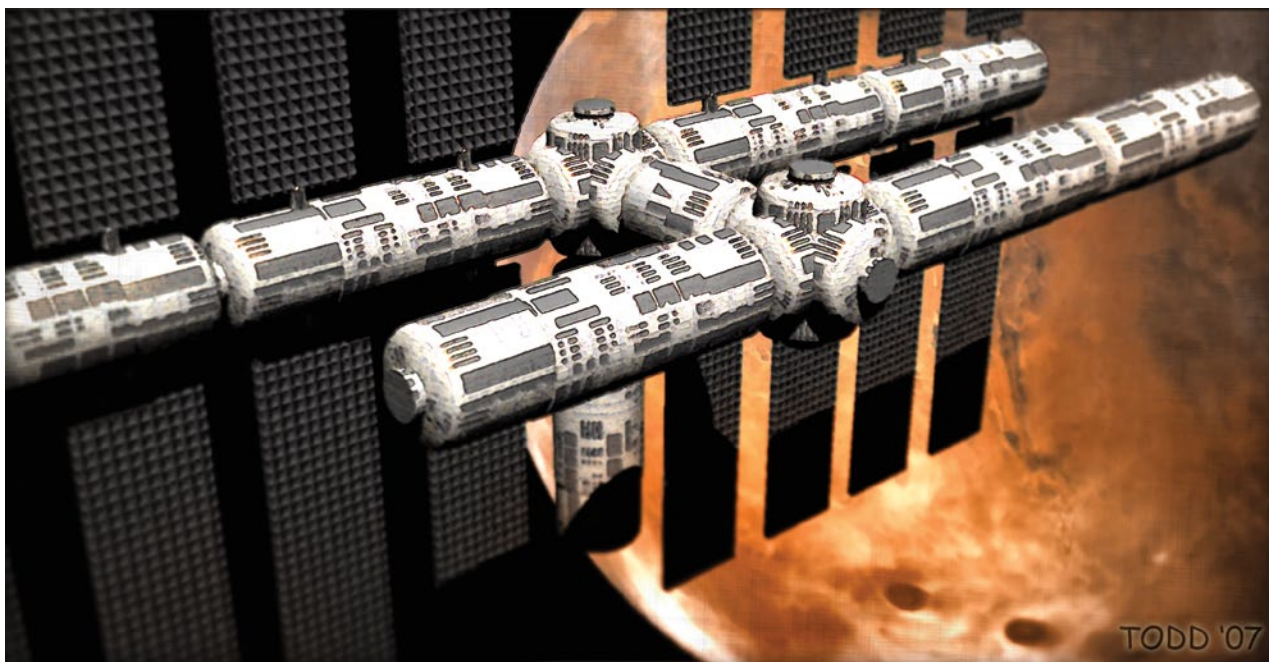
With Vanguard ready in the summer of 1967 and “ETR” (Entanglement Transmitter/Receiver)

communication proven a dramatic success, America was ready to launch its most important space attempt yet: landing an American on Mars.

Sojourner 1 (1968)

Launched from the space station America on May 7, 1968, the high-speed experimental probe *Sojourner 1* was sent on a course that would take it past Jupiter and then out to the edge of the Solar System itself. It was designed by a quartet of Hyperbrains in the employ of the Sandia National Defense Research Labs, and was arguably the most advanced piece of electronics made to date. It employed cutting-edge heuristics that imitated a basic intelligence to deal with in-flight problems, and employed a swarm of micro-probes to repair damaged components and even improve on them over time. It became the basis for the American Heuristic Battlefield Drones of the 1980s.

Using an experimental high-energy propulsion system developed by the American Hyperbrain Micah Nerut, *Sojourner 1* would accelerate to become the fastest object in the Solar System before its propulsion core burned out, and it would theo-



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retically continue transmitting data for decades afterward. *Sojourner's* primary mission was to send back data on the area outside the heliopause, the bubble of high-energy particles that surround the Solar System.

Even at the outrageous speeds it was traveling it would take nearly seven years for the probe to breach the edge of the Solar System and travel out into the interstellar medium. *Sojourner 1* remained classified for three and a half years after its launch due to the space crises that consumed the globe in the late 1960s, but after its announcement, news of the spacecraft's progress became water-cooler talk around the globe.

Chaos at the Convention (1968)

As if drawn by some unseen force, a huge influx of peace activists moved in on Chicago for the Democratic National Convention. There was no clear agenda. Some were there to support the nominee Senator John F. Kennedy, others were there to protest space escalation and directed kinetic weapons, still others because it was "the place to be." By the second day of the convention, nearly 100,000 "hippies" clogged the streets of Chicago. The governor of Illinois called in the National Guard, including the Army's Wild Talent "Team One" to police the situation. This rapidly led to trouble.

While Kennedy was confirmed as the Democratic candidate, scuffles between protesters and troops grew in severity. When a 21-year old woman named Mary Polski had her skull fractured by a rifle butt, riots broke out. Downtown Chicago was looted and burned while the National Guard and Army Talents tried to break up the protests. On the third day, after the fourth death of a protester in as many hours, the Odd Squad suddenly appeared.

These independent Wild Talents were known to many, but until now their existence had not been confirmed. The group brought an end to the riots

and brought the protesters, now nearly 150,000 strong, to a peaceful "sit in" near the convention center.

But the Army was unimpressed. The crowd was ordered to disperse by the Army Talent "Team One." A 24-hour countdown began, televised on every major channel worldwide. When the clock hit zero, Army Team One entered to forcibly remove the protesters and the Odd Squad. By that time, at the Odd Squad's encouragement, many of the protesters had left, and most of the area had been evacuated except for the Army, the Wild Talents and the press, which filmed much of the monumental battle.

The fight that ensued leveled four city blocks and left several members of Team One in need of serious medical treatment. The Odd Squad was famously pictured leaving the area strewn with the unconscious or incapacitated members of the Army Talent team.

Public opinion of the Odd Squad and the protesters was resoundingly positive, and the actions of the Army Talent team were uniformly seen as "provocative" at best. Interest in the Odd Squad and the peace movement grew at an exponential rate over the next year, culminating with the famous Dick Cavett "Roswell" interview with IAM, the Odd Squad's resident alien Hyperbrain.

President John F. Kennedy (1968)

A Democratic senator from Massachusetts rose to public prominence as the presidential election heated up: John F. Kennedy, a 51-year-old firebrand with a heroic war record and a prominent family. Kennedy was seen as a golden boy, and his photogenic good looks and public presence struck fear into the hearts of the competition. In response, the Republican party nominated Ronald Reagan, the governor of California, who was a well-known movie star.

The Kennedy campaign, riding high from President Humphrey's successes, pushed Reagan's cooperation with the 1950s Communist witch-hunts of Senator Joe McCarthy and his avoidance of the military in World War II, while Reagan's campaign pushed his wholesome, well-known image as the "safe" choice for America.

The Kennedy/Reagan race proved much closer than anyone predicted, with Reagan garnering far more support for the Republicans than analysts imagined, but in the end Kennedy became the 36th president of the United States. Kennedy promised "to continue the fight against Soviet aggression, on this world and beyond."

Syrtis Major (1969)

American astronauts set foot on Mars for the first time on October 9, 1969. This was the culmination of the American space program since its earliest inception at the end of World War II, but it came almost as an afterthought. The world had become jaded with the space program, and the most relevant space news story was the armament of various stations, bases and craft in Earth orbit and beyond. Few in the public of both the U.S.S.R. and America were pleased with the looming threat of a non-nuclear holocaust. Since directed kinetic weapons could be used as tactical weapons without fear of radiation, they were considered the single greatest threat to mankind's future, and to a large degree nuclear weapons fell by the wayside—just another impractical weapon system abandoned by world governments.

Fewer than half the people who had watched the Moon landing in 1962 tuned in to watch the Mars landing.

After several months of construction, Syrtis Major was officially "opened" on February 10, 1969. This first, permanent base on Mars became yet an-

other bastion of the Cold War, a "backup" in case a sneak attack decimated the Earth—something which, as the conflict deepened in the Middle East, looked more and more likely. By 1971 nearly 250 Americans, British and Canadians were permanent residents of Syrtis Major, prepared to carry on the human race in case of some earthly apocalypse.

Campaign Setting: Life on Mars

By the early 1970s the Mars Syrtis Major base has the single highest percentage of Wild Talents per capita than any other American "settlement." Nearly 70% of those manning the base are Wild Talents of some description. Builders, gadgeteers, teleporters and super-durable "bricks" are the most common types of Wild Talents found there.

Syrtis Major is a hive of activity, with an ever-expanding network of tunnels, specially-shielded greenhouses, thousands of catch-as-catch-can gadgets to make life easier, and endless plans for further exploration and expansion. Even by 1992, only 25% of Mars had been visited by humans. Syrtis Major is obsessed with mapping the planet down to meticulous detail, as well as answering the age-old question: Is there life on Mars? Or, more likely: *Was* there life on Mars?

Evidence of both water activity and a formerly warm climate have whetted the appetites of U.S. Space Command. Whether or not there was or is life on Mars remains up to the GM. More importantly, is it simply the product of some deranged Wild Talent in the Syrtis Major crew, a Soviet trick, or something worse? There are a thousand questions to be answered, and a new world ready to be explored and conquered.



Interview With the Alien (1969)

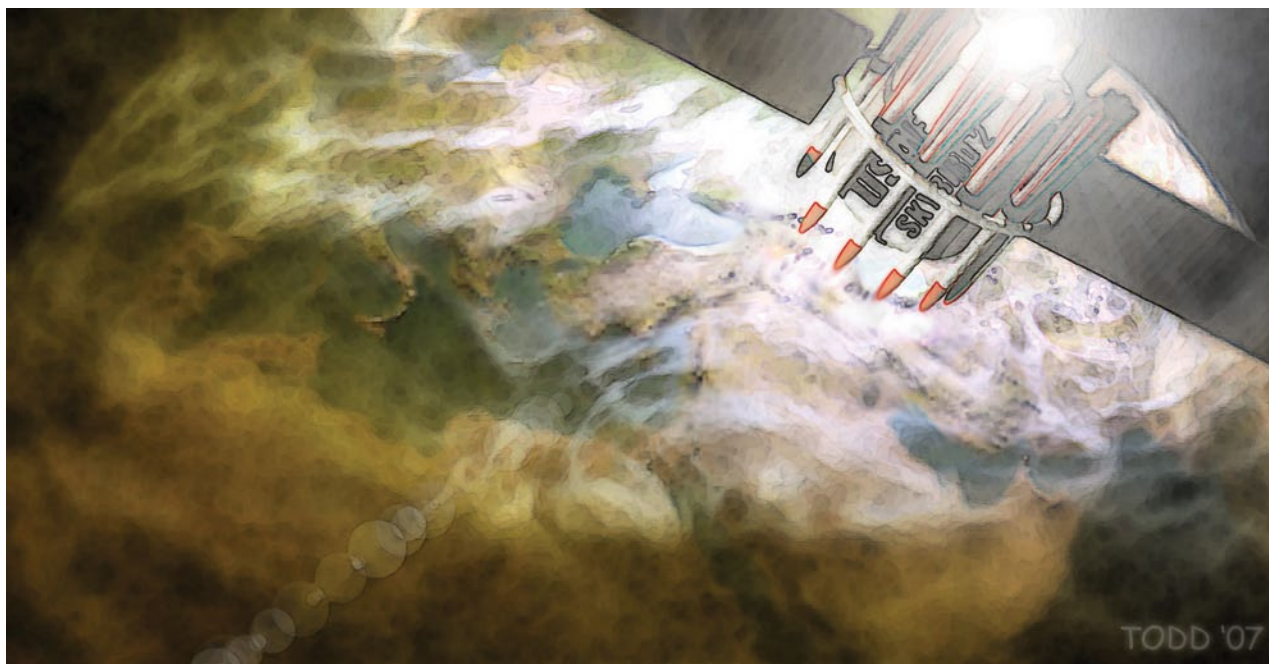
The strange creature IAM appeared on the Dick Cavett show on the evening of March 10, 1969. Though rumors of the Army Air Corps recovering a flying disc in the summer of 1947 had permeated the popular culture, few put much credence in the story. The world had seen a lot of strangeness in the post-WWII world of Wild Talents, and IAM had been spotted on several occasions during various Odd Squad operations, but no one was prepared for the story the creature wove on the talk show.

The Air Force was besieged with public interest and press requests. In the wake of the show, President Kennedy called for a Senate inquiry into the “Roswell Incident,” which culminated in the forced retirement in 1970 of General Nathan Twining,

the commander of the U.S. Air Force. During this time, photographs of the “creature’s” ship and military footage from the late 1940s became public material, riding the headlines for years. IAM became a huge celebrity.

IAM was recognized by the U.S. government in 1972 as a “Visiting Emissary with All Attendant Privileges,” making him the equivalent of a foreign ambassador. Other governments soon followed, eager to have an “in” just in case the alien’s comment at the end of the Cavett show proved to be true:

“There are many others in the stars. They will come here. Soon.”



The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Friend (1971 to 1992)

“Today, my fellow Americans, we face a threat not only to our way of life and our country, but to our entire species.” *Walter Mondale, 39th president of the United States, on the announcement of the “Builder” extraterrestrial signal, April 2, 1984.*

The Lebanon Crisis (1971)

On December 22, 1970, Soviet-backed Israeli forces marched on Lebanon under the guise of capturing a “rogue nuclear weapon” in the region. It was implied this weapon was of American manufacture and threatened Israeli sovereignty.

Lebanon stood little chance against the Soviet/Israeli juggernaut, but its mixed forces fought long and hard to hold them back.

Syria, fearful of Israeli occupation of a floundering Lebanon, marched into the country on January 3, 1971, where they were hailed as heroes. Laden with American equipment and advisors, the Syr-

ians took much of the northern part of the country before an Israeli invasion could reach Beirut. President Kennedy sent a strongly-worded message to Moscow: cross the line past Beirut or try to take the capital and the war would “escalate.” NATO forces and U.S. Space Command went on full alert.

For twenty days, Soviet and Israeli forces marched north towards the point of no return, the line in the sand that Kennedy had established. Directed kinetic weapon platforms prepared to launch non-nuclear strikes on every major Russian city and select allies around the world. The news was filled with headlines predicting the end of the world. President Kennedy was quoted as saying, “Never before have we come so close to the end of everything.”

The Soviet-Israeli forces arrived at the point of no return of January 23. There they stopped, dug in and stared down the American/Syrian forces on the other side of the unofficial partition.

The demilitarized zone, a 2,000-meter no-man’s land between the two halves of Lebanon, slowly congealed over the next year.

Campaign Setting: No-Man's Land

The confrontation between the Soviet Union and America in Lebanon led to a burst in espionage, black ops, kidnapping and assassinations in the region. Suddenly, any country bordering or near to Lebanon became a hotbed of intrigue, violence and worse. Russian Wild Talents worked to secure intelligence on American placements, while American Wild Talents infiltrated the Russians' allies in the hopes of discovering just what they were planning next.

For nine years Lebanon was the focus of world news, and the violence, death and destruction which ravaged the region had many believing it would be the flashpoint for a world-ending war. At any moment after 1971—more than 70% of Americans believed—the Cold War could go hot.

Players can take the roles of Soviet, Israeli, Syrian or American forces at the partition, or behind enemy lines, gathering intelligence for the war everyone believes is coming.

Kennedy's Illness (1971)

President John F. Kennedy declined running for a second term, announcing in the summer of 1971 that despite treatment from the best doctors and Wild Talents possible, injuries sustained to his back during the war (which led to several life-threatening surgeries over the years) levied a growing toll on his health. In truth, even after his conditions were completely cured by Talent medicine, Kennedy found himself addicted to pain killers, and this secret weighed heavily on his conscience. Despite his popularity, and a term which saw America's first astronaut on Mars, a dramatic showdown with the Soviet Union, and the apparent confirmation of alien life, Kennedy was

fearful his condition—which he could tell no one about—would only grow worse.

Kennedy retired from politics in 1972 and settled in Hyannisport, spending his remaining years sailing and writing books. He would go on to win the Pulitzer prize in literature in 1978 for his book *Lebanon*, on the 1971 Soviet-American Lebanon Crisis. He died, quietly, at home in 1981.

The Home Computer Revolution (1972)

In the spring of 1972 the Xerox Corporation produced the first home computer system in cooperation with the government of India: the Xerox Home Office. This device was made available to the world at the breakthrough price of \$540 in North America. After months of public skepticism by technology pundits from the Pentagon to *Popular Science*, it was announced the Xerox Home Office had sold more than a million units worldwide, putting an end to the argument that “no one would use a computer at home.” In fact, the Home Office sold so swiftly that it took the press weeks to catch up with the demand for information on the subject.

The Home Office would remain the ubiquitous computer of the decade, allowing people to point and click on a virtual desktop, send text and pictures to other Home Office users, and draw, do engineering work and explore the growing “Grid” of connected Home Office machines.

Companies like IBM, which entered the home computer market a day late and a dollar short, found they were competing with a nearly flawless device produced at cutthroat prices only available in India. After three abortive attempts to “steal” the market and the loss of nearly a half a billion dollars, IBM withdrew from the market permanently focusing on “what we do best,” meaning mainframe computers. What they didn't know was that in less than a decade, the mainframe would be dead.

Technology in the 1970s: State of the Art

Computers

The 1970s were the era that gave birth to “ubiquitous computing,” and by the end of the decade nearly everyone on the planet had access to a computer. After being introduced in 1978, the Xerox Notepad—a personal computer, telephone and Grid access point—became the single highest-selling electronics product of all time.

Computers were no longer used only in business or by the military, they were appliances. With the birth of the Grid, a huge interconnection of computers in the U.S. and abroad, a new marketplace was created which spurred the global economy. People shopped, sent mail, chatted and traded ideas over this unregulated interconnection like never before.

Television

Televisions became larger and took up less power, and in 1976 in a cooperation between Phillips and Magnavox, went flat. Recessed wireless televisions became incredibly popular. By the end of the decade, the transition from tube televisions to other, more

modern technologies was complete.

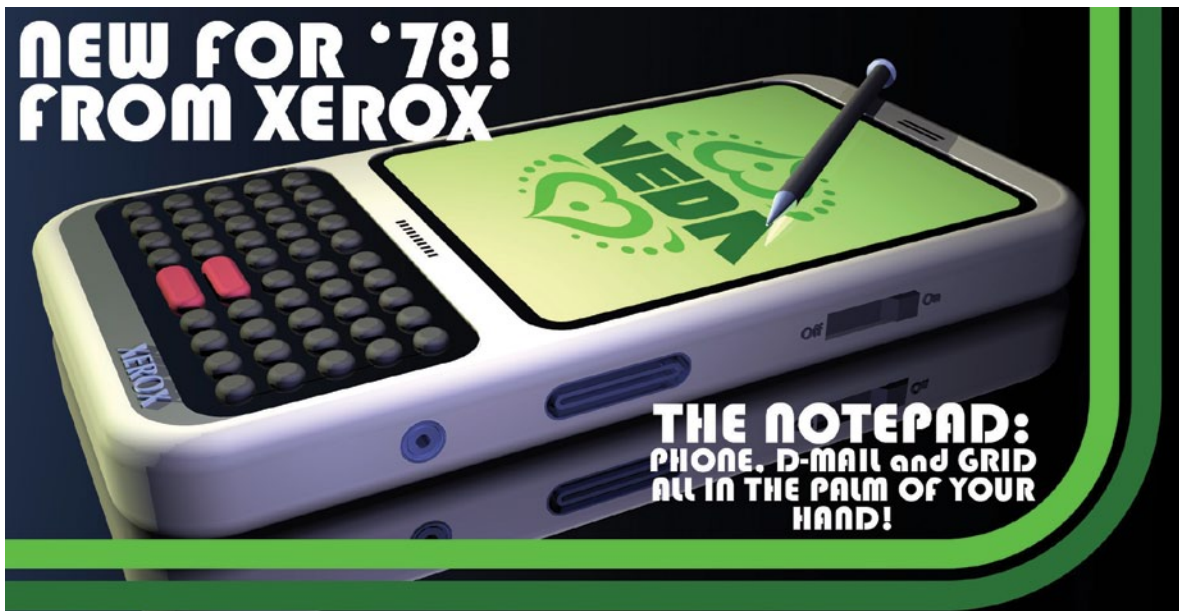
Cable television also rose with this trend, overtaking the number of homes which used commercial television by 1977.

‘Gadgets’

The 1970s will be remembered as the decade of gadgets. Many were used to further political movements.

In 1971, Dr. Diego Sandoz, the American leader of Unconventional Research Projects, went rogue, fleeing from military custody at Vannevar, Arizona. When the military pursued him and pinned him down in a Texas hotel, he held the Dallas area hostage with a “gravitic negator” which he claimed would remove the effect of orbital spin on everything under one ton in the region, flinging it into space. While he made his escape with a “dead man’s switch,” members of the URP Go-Team disarmed the gadget.

In 1972, Augustus Callon, a Costa Rican national with an incredible knack for gadgets, seized control of Costa Rica with the use of his Wild Talent ma-



chinery. His coup lasted only nine days before he vanished, never to be seen again (many believe the Teevees were responsible for his disappearance).

Two hijackings in the Middle East involved gadgeteers and two major incidents at major sporting events in the U.K. by IRA rebel-gadgeteers led to a second wave of government scrutiny on the matter.

Medicine

Wild Talent medicine, which up until this point had been used only by the rich and famous, became common enough for the average person—or at least, for the average person willing to spend heavily. These procedures, from removing 200 pounds of fat without a scalpel, correcting blindness, or simply removing a birth defect, fell in cost as more and more private practices of Wild Talent healers turned up in countries where their processes were unregulated.

The prices for such procedures were still exorbitant, but for the first time nearly anybody with a decent job in the U.S. could save up enough in five or ten years to extend their life, fix their appearance, change their sex and more.

Of course, with this increase in number of Wild Talent healers, scams abounded, but this was not the only problem. People attempting to reenter the U.S. after undergoing vast reconstructive “surgery” often found themselves detained for days, weeks and even months at the border while their identity was verified.

Travel

New, faster, low-fuel-consumption supersonic jets were introduced at the beginning of the 1970s, effectively halving the cost of airline travel. It became common to jump on a jet and fly cross-country to spend a day or two at a friend’s house, and international travel was no longer an ordeal.

It was also during this decade that dedicated SCRAM jet lines became a reality. These vehicles flew at incredible altitudes at breathtaking speeds. The Pan-Am SCRAM line, which connected New York to L.A., London, Paris, New Delhi, Tokyo and Maui became an incredibly popular way to travel. A trip which had once taken eight hours was over in 80 minutes.

Spaceflight

The 1970s marked the complete armament of space. Orbital weapons platforms dotted the night sky, and rail guns in orbit and on the surface of the Moon were prepared to launch directed kinetic weapons at a moment’s notice. Military garrisons occupied stations in Earth orbit, prepared to board and destroy enemy installations if the axe fell.

Teleportation took care of the various costs of lifting payloads to orbits, replacing inefficient chemical rockets forever. The U.S. averaged three tons of materiel sent into orbit on a daily basis, with the Soviet Union close behind.

Weapons

Weapons continued to advance. The average American soldier in the Middle East was armed with the equivalent explosive potential of a battalion of WWII soldiers.

'The Stars Make No Noise' (1977)

Odd readings from the Sojourner 1 spacecraft were rapidly deciphered by the Hyperbrain Micah Nerut on the morning of April 29, 1977, just moments after the craft became the first vehicle to exit the solar system. Months before, the readings of the craft confirmed something which scientists had long guessed: A charged bubble of high-energy particles surrounded the entire solar system, engulfing it—the heliopause. Beyond it was the true emptiness of interstellar space. Now the readings beyond the heliopause (relayed back to mission control faster than the speed of light) were odd.

Nerut saw the truth inside the discrepancies from numbers sent back from the probe, and scribbled on an old McDonald's wrapper what would become the most significant mathematical formula since " $E=MC^2$ ".

The Nerut Heliopause Doppler Theory predicted that the heliopause distorted every radio signal entering or exiting the solar system under a certain wattage, causing clear signals to be disrupted and lost in what sounded like cosmic static. He didn't realize the implications of his discovery until he tried it out.

Nerut quickly reconfigured the 22-meter dishes of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory to compensate for the distortion of the heliopause and realized very quickly that his theory had just become a fact. Almost every main sequence star, "seen" for the first time clear of its distorting heliopause, was transmitting an intelligent signal. Each world, trapped within the silence of its own heliopause, believed it too was alone.

The universe was brimming with intelligent life.

Portables (1978)

In just six years, Xerox and the government of India had redefined the concept of computing. No longer were they impersonal washing machine-sized boxes found only in government labs and colleges; they were as personal and as useful as a

Project EARSHOT

The Heliopause Doppler Theory was immediately classified and a huge project was created to decipher the myriad signals being eavesdropped; hopes were high that some sort of technological leverage could be gained through a cataloging of signals. Sixty-three Hyperbrains spent three years attempting to decipher the specifics of two particular signals, with little or no success. Despite various intriguing pictures pulled from the transmissions showing alien vistas and creatures (some showing things which could not even be identified), the project came to the conclusion that little or nothing of applicable use could be gleaned from the signals. This was not what the American military industrial complex wanted to hear.

In the face of this "failure," EARSHOT was reconfigured as a think-tank to consider the problems evident in first contact with an alien species. Despite the fact that the world public believed this had already occurred (with the Roswell crash and IAM), few of the Hyperbrains were under such illusions. Most believed IAM was nothing more than another deranged Wild Talent.

EARSHOT ran thousands of simulations of a first contact, including war simulations. One Hyperbrain, Daniel Baxter Smith, predicted that within a decade first contact would occur, whether Earth instigated it or not. He ended his report with the ominous statement, "We will not be the first beings to have discovered the heliopause and its properties, or to monitor alien transmissions. As such, we should prepare for war. If they are coming, and I believe they are, they will come as conquerors, not as saviors."

The Grid

This “cat’s cradle of connected Home Offices” led to an amazing revolution in communication. Using the normal telephone line, and a Xerox Home Office, people were trading D-Mail (“Digital Mail”) and serving up Nodes (pages of information) on the Grid within hours. This use exploded exponentially with Nodes on nearly every subject popping up in dozens of languages around the globe over the next three years.

By the turn of the century, the Grid was composed of nearly 100 billion Nodes and nearly everyone on the planet was tapped into it through various “portables.” By 1978, D-Mail had become the most popular form of communication on the planet.

journal or diary. Riding the crest of the wave was the Indian software firm Veda, run by the brilliant Abhijat Maharajapuram, a programmer who rapidly became the world’s richest man through his clever licensing schemes and an exclusive deal with Xerox worked out in 1971. By 1978 Veda was a world name, bigger than IBM, McDonald’s and Coca-Cola. Xerox and Veda were seen as an unstoppable force in computing.

Over 255 million Xerox Home Offices had permeated the globe, creating the Grid, a new way of communicating. Nearly everyone on the planet had access to D-Mail account and computing was taught in schools all over the world. But this was not enough for Xerox. In 1978 the company announced the Xerox Notepad, a hand-held portable computer with nearly all the functions of a Xerox Home Office and some new, dramatic breakthroughs. It was an instant hit. For the first time, integrated hand-writing recognition was built in as well as portable phone functionality.

Within two years, the success of the Notepad dwarfed the sales of the Xerox Home Office. In ten years, nearly everyone in the civilized world carried the descendant of the Xerox Notepad everywhere with them; it was their diary, telephone, D-Mail access point and more.

The age of ubiquitous computing had dawned.

The Space Treaty (1981)

The newly-inaugurated President Walter Mondale made the startling step of convening with Soviet leader Viktor Grishin in Iceland just weeks into his presidency. Mondale had just been briefed on the Heliopause Doppler Theory, and had read Daniel Baxter Smith’s proposal that an invading alien force might be heading for Earth at any time. To the press, the meeting was about a space treaty, something to control the directed kinetic weapon escalation which had been building since the mid 1960s. In truth, Mondale confessed to the startled Russian leader that America had detected alien signals, and though he refused to share the science behind it, he did share all information on what was monitored from those signals. Grishin was horrified, both by the speculation of American Hyper-brains that an attack on Earth could be imminent, and the fact that America had failed to alert the world to the situation.

Mondale and Grishin very quickly formed an unlikely friendship, despite the circumstances. The Soviet leader realized that Mondale had just come by the information and was completely truthful.

To the public, the meeting and signing of a space treaty in just fourteen days seemed incredibly out of step with where the Cold War had been proceeding. In actuality, once the Soviet military saw some of the simulations of an attack on Earth by an alien force, no one saw any choice but to agree to the treaty.

NATO and the Soviet Union suddenly began cooperating, and within a year were performing

Worldwide Life in the 1970s and 1980s

Due to two decades of vast improvements to communications, irrigation, food delivery, productivity and more, many Third World countries suddenly found themselves numbered among the First World nations. Cambodia, Kenya, Congo, India and others were suddenly production capitals, filled with educated, well-fed citizens ruled by benevolent democracies carefully put in place (and carefully watched) by Teevee Hyperbrains.

Third World nations did still exist, and for the most part, in much of the world, poverty was still a vast and seemingly insurmountable problem. However, the formerly huge pandemics of disease and starvation were largely stamped out by Wild Talent intervention. Several of the classic “poor diseases” such as cholera, dysentery and smallpox were eliminated in several world-spanning Teevee efforts. Doctors were left in place by the Teevee organization with enough medicine to last decades, created as needed in massive amounts by Wild Talents.

Even the most backwards nations on Earth enjoyed miraculous and seemingly infinite supplies of freeze-dried foodstuffs, teleported at regular intervals by the Teevees. Hyberbrain breakthroughs in filtration technology led to the mass production and distribution of the “Adam Straw,” a cheap, easily-produced straw created by the artificial intelligence Adam to allow formerly unpotable water to be drunk without fear of disease.

Throughout these two decades, the world was on track to become a place that was at least tolerable—if it wasn’t destroyed by a directed-kinetic conflagration or aliens from the stars first.

Life in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s

The United States saw a boost in prosperity as the information age dawned. Though they missed the first wave, America was soon well on track to recapture the rising tide of information technology.

Still, fears haunted American life—the fear of their country’s progress flagging, having been only three decades before a backwards ex-fiefdom of the United Kingdom; the fear of a world-ending conflict with the Soviet Union; and finally, in 1984, the fear of the world itself being consumed by alien invasion.

Talents

Talents remained an American obsession untouched by any other. Attempts to demonize the Teevees as an anti-American agency failed, and many in the U.S. felt the government could take its cue from the Teevee organization with its world-spanning benevolence and dedication.

During these two decades, dedicated organizations in the U.S. and every major country began tracking existing Teevee members, in an attempt to curtail their quiet “interference” with world governments.

For the most part, however, Talents remained highly fictionalized quasi-celebrities in movies and music, with little impact on day-to-day American life beyond entertainment.

Crime

Crime grew along with the illicit drug trade in the U.S. in the 1970s. Asian drug cartels “shipped” tons of material using Talents, fueling the drug-soaked decade of the 1980s.

Talent-produced “designer drugs” became the rage in the late 1980s, with made-to-order effects for those with enough cash.

Talent crime became more violent, amoral and ubiquitous behind the scenes than ever before. Anti-Talent-Crime agencies often had an impossibly hard time even identifying the victims of such crimes, much less their perpetrators. Witnesses and victims literally vanished into thin air, never to be seen again. American counter-intelligence programs brought the Army into the “War on Drugs” in the 1980s, with hundreds of covert operations to crush the drug cartels in Columbia, Afghanistan and Tibet.

Politics

American politics was divided in this time. The president seemed to vacillate between a pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet message, despite the fact that the two countries in the 1970s were on the verge of a world-spanning war. By 1980, with the Soviet-American Space treaty, few knew what to think. Many believed this was just indicative of a weak president; what they didn’t know was the weight that the prospect of alien civilizations conquering Earth held in the minds of the president and the American military.

When the announcement came that alien civilizations had been discovered, few were surprised—most believed that IAM represented the first envoy from the stars—but the concept of combining forces worldwide against the alien threat consumed nearly every waking moment of the world’s most powerful men from 1980 onwards.



Technology in the 1980s: State of the Art

Computers

In this decade, computers were cemented forever as the planet's primary mode of communication. The Xerox Notepad rapidly replaced the bulkier Xerox Home Office. For the first time, people walked around with all the information of the planet in their pocket, on a device the size of a calculator.

As the ever-expanding line of Xerox Notepads grew in ability, television, radio, music, telephone, D-Mail and the Grid all became accessible from this tiny device. The effect on world culture was immense. People from New York interacted with people from Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Indonesia in real time over the Grid, day or night. Cultures met and clashed in the digital world, allowing a free exchange of ideas between vastly differing populations.

The children who grew up in this era were called "Grid Kids," and their understanding of world culture and the differences between peoples laid the framework for the stability of the Berne Accord of the next decade.

Television

Television, which had boomed in the previous three decades, took a serious downswing in viewership with the birth of ubiquitous com-

puting. The older generation still tuned in, but the young flocked to the Grid and the growing aspects of entertainment to be found on it.

Hyperbrains at film studios saw this trend and jumped on it, decimating pay cable in just a few years. D-Movies became a reality in the early 1980s. One click and a high-quality movie was downloaded for later viewing nearly anywhere in the world.

As data speeds increased and delivery costs dwindled, the conventional model of cable and commercial television collapsed. By 1989, television was a dead end and almost all entertainment was delivered through the Grid.

'Gadgets'

Lobbyists for several private toy firms pioneered new laws in the United States to allow the creation of "regulated gadgets." By 1985 one toy company, Tycho, was permitted to produce a limited-edition gadget toy called "Tech Tots." These interactive automatons were too small and harmless to pose any threat. Each "Tot" would learn, alter its behavior depending on its environment and owner, and otherwise act as a "gadget pet" in a completely convincing manner. These toys were a smash hit, selling out in only a few days, each

toy garnering a street price in the high thousands.

By the end of the decade, dozens of government-regulated gadget lines were in production by various companies, ranging from pocket watches with holographic cameras to self-assembling backpack catamarans. Gadgets were discovered to be a lucrative, controllable business that spurred the American economy.

Medicine

The costs of Wild Talent medicine continued to drop throughout the 1980s. As the market solidified a clear caste system was established, and Wild Talent Healers formed their own international union in 1983. Called the World Healer Alliance, it established ethical-practice rules, a rough pay structure and a tier system based on location and level of ability.

People looking for cheap Wild Talent treatment could jet down to Mexico or Cuba for a weekend. Those looking for a new body, a complete reconstruction, or a reversal of aging would find themselves in Switzerland, the home of the WHA and the most powerful Wild Talent healers in the world.

Travel

SCRAM transport from coast to coast or across the Atlantic or Pacific oceans became commonplace in the 1980s. While smaller, fuel-efficient hypersonic jets flew point to point within most respective countries at incredibly low prices, SCRAM transport became the standard for long-distance flights.

Due to new technological breakthroughs, over the decade the price of an average SCRAM flight dropped by half, becoming affordable for nearly any average American.

Spaceflight

The 1980s marked the first cooperation in space between the Soviets and the Western nations. Up until this point, nearly every move in space was an attempt to outmaneuver the enemy; exploration and science were only convenient excuses. Due to the discovery of intelligent life in the universe, however, the adverseries had no choice but to consolidate their forces and prepare for possible attack.

Together, the two vast economies managed to speed up the exploration of the solar system. Soviet remote probes to Venus, Mercury, Saturn and Jupiter were made possible by the sharing of American space technology, while American programs saw a boost in

the creation and maintenance of space platforms by Soviet space-capable Wild Talents.

By 1990, the world was secretly prepared for an alien invasion that Hyperbrains on all sides considered not only imminent, but unavoidable.

Weapons

With the collapse of the Cold War suddenly in 1980 with the creation of the Soviet-U.S. Space Treaty, weapons remained much as they had in the previous decade. Advancements in communications, rates of fire, and explosive potential continued, but not nearly at their previous pace.

Progress was made on the integration of artificial intelligence technology (first pioneered in the 1960s), including A.I. weapons systems. Heuristic systems which effectively imitated a reasoning human mind were fielded after nearly a decade of testing. These slow-moving systems were meant as point defense units, brimming with various weapons and an incredible array of sensors. Their first battlefield use was guarding the 2,000 meter no-man's land of the Lebanon partition. However, their field service was short-lived. Within a year, the Soviet-American Space Treaty brought an end to the conflict, and they were moth-balled.

The major focus of the world economy was placed instead on the increased armament of space with bigger, more accurate and more destructive directed kinetic weapons. Together, the Soviet Union and the United States managed to outstrip the DKW build-up of the last two decades, tripling their maximum destructive potential from 10 to 30 gigatons in just a few years.

The Technological Plateau

From this point on in the timeline, world technology slows its advance somewhat. Hyperbrain Erin Carruthers suggested in her paper "The Technological Plateau" that the rate of advance on technology could not continue unimpeded. Instead, she suggested, that the number of "significant" breakthroughs—since there was a finite number of them—would decrease over time. If one measured the technological spectrum from least advanced to most advanced, the progress would seem to slow as one approached the end of the spectrum, since the end could never be conceivably reached.

Increases in storage, speed, power and more continued however throughout the next decade.

joint military exercises on their borders in Europe and in the Middle East. The world was thrown for a loop, but it looked like the Cold War was suddenly and unexpectedly coming to an end. The first Soviet astronauts were soon visiting American facilities on the moon and Mars and the Soviet and American space programs planned several joint outposts on moons of the outer planets. These plans were actually to construct monitoring posts to search for probes, ships or even creatures that might visit the Solar System.

The world didn't know that Russia and America were preparing for the greatest threat mankind had ever faced. No one knew when or from where it might come, but few in the know could deny the facts: Earth was surrounded on all sides by unknown species with technology that could be centuries beyond that of man. Suddenly, the conflict that had driven the world to the brink of self-destruction seemed foolish. Mankind's only hope was not religion, ideology or nationalism; it was unification.

For the first time in human history, at least in limited circles, it was Earth versus everyone else.

'The End of All Things' (1982)

As the heuristic computer at the center of project EARSHOT continued to catalog individual signals from thousands of stars surrounding our solar system, it hit upon something it had not seen before: two stars transmitting the same signal. Within a week of alerting researchers to this fact, EARSHOT discovered another star with the same signal. These stars were, at the minimum, more than four light years from one another. They were transmitting a signal that took Heliopause Doppler into account; like Earth, they could clearly "see" through the energy bubbles of surrounding stars. EARSHOT had discovered exactly what the Hyperbrain Daniel Baxter Smith feared—evidence of the first known interstellar empire.

Secrets: The Suicide of Dr. Daniel Baxter Smith

One of the suicides to occur during the Builder conflict was the Hyperbrain Daniel Baxter Smith, the man who had predicted the attack on Earth as part of project EARSHOT. Writing a report on his death, American Hyperbrains began noticing oddities in Smith's life and the detection of the Builder signal.

On April 1, 1982, the same day the first of the Builder signals was detected, Smith finalized his divorce from his third wife. On March 25, 1984—the same day the World Ship was detected—Smith's mother Marlene died in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And finally, on May 18, 1986, Smith committed suicide, leaving behind a rambling suicide note.

A theory arose from Smith's earlier writings—many of which seemed to deal with dangerous alien species attacking Earth—that Smith himself "created" the Builders with nothing more than the power of his mind; not consciously, but as a "Mad Talent"-type mental illness.

The fact that everything to date might be nothing more than the power of the human mind given form was disturbing to say the least. The details of Smith's death were covered up by the American military.

Worse, the nearest signal was less than 11.5 light years from Earth. The strongest source of the signal seemed to be Epsilon Eridani, a variable star which seemed to be surrounded with some sort of pre-planetary disc of debris.

This information was shared with the Soviet Union, and for the first time articles from secret portions of the space treaty signed between the



super powers were enacted. Within two months NORAD, U.S. Space Command and the Soviet Air/Space Command were a single network, and secondary allies on both sides of the Iron Curtain were alerted to the threat. Faced with outside attack by alien forces, the militaries of the world secretly began to congeal into a single unified force.

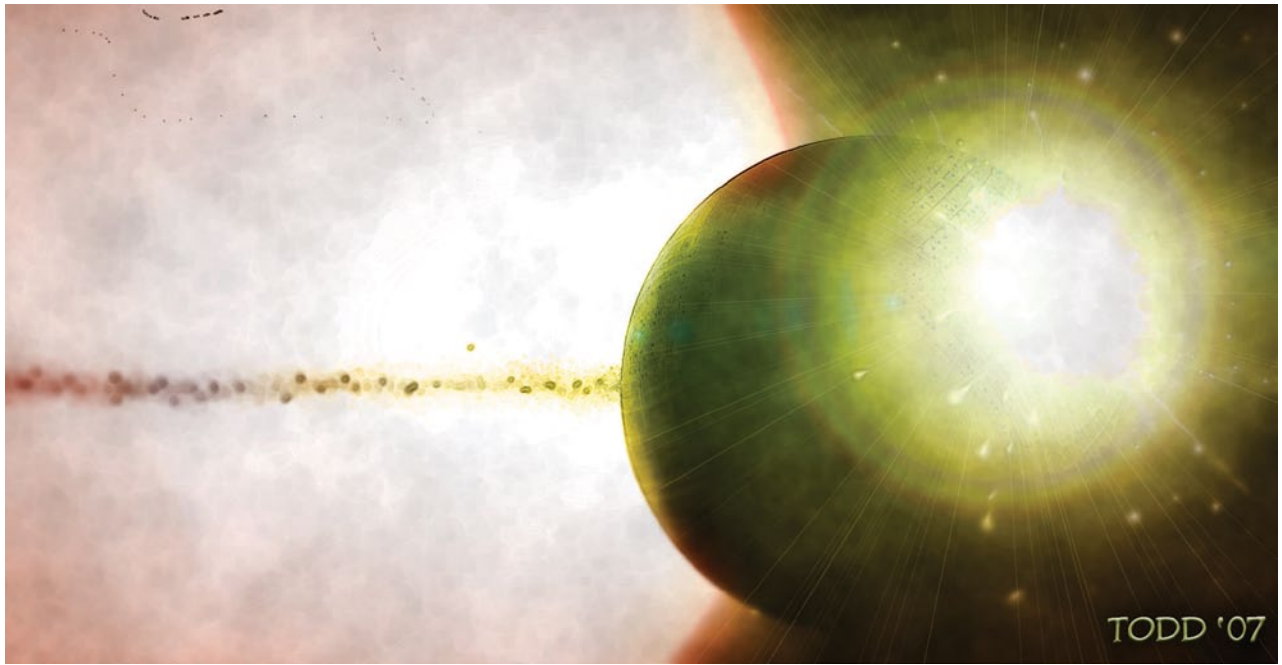
Rumors soon began to leak out. Soon the world militaries faced a barrage of questions from the press. For more than a year and a half, both the American president and Soviet leader refused to comment on the story, hoping it would die out naturally. Instead it took on a life of its own, with hundreds of “insider” stories telling of a joint Soviet-American command preparing for invasion from the stars.

Spying on Epsilon Eridani (1983)

Now a joint project between America and the Soviet Union, EARSHOT began an intensive campaign of spying on Epsilon Eridani, the proposed center of the interstellar empire that had Earth up in arms. Several esoteric methods were used to monitor Epsilon Eridani, including Wild Talent precognitives, clairvoyants and remote sensors. No one had ever even considered using such powers for deep space monitoring, and the results were striking.

The images which came back were uniform and disturbing. They showed a star surrounded by a ring, estimated to be 0.53 astronomical units from the surface, with a single dark band on one side. This ring was angular, artificial and vast; it clearly presented the interstellar empire (which had to that point been referred to simply as “the threat”) as very technologically advanced.

It was from this project that the alien species gained its name: “The Builders.”



The Announcement (1984)

After more than a year of rampant news coverage of the “story of the century,” Soviet and American scientists in a joint announcement confirmed to the stunned world the existence of extraterrestrial life and the Builder signal. Though many in the world already believed alien contact had been made—with IAM—the news still came as a shock. Particularly the fact that the Earth was surrounded on all sides by alien species.

Despite attempts to prevent an economic problem, world markets plunged. Mass suicides occurred; riots took place in Indonesia, Africa and China; and hundreds of thousands gathered in Rome to seek guidance from the Catholic Church.

Conflict ceased in the Middle East for the first time in decades and nearly 50,000 people gathered in Jerusalem to hold vigil.

The whole history of human conflict slowly spun on a pivot. Over the next two years ancient, long-standing conflicts seem to fade, like fires starved by lack of air. The world turned their eyes to the skies and wondered: When would they come?

And when they did, did Earth stand a chance?

Detection (1985)

One of seven joint American-Russian deep space probes launched in 1984 detected a large gravitational body that suddenly appeared at the edge of the solar plane, past the orbit of Neptune, on March 25, 1984. The object was dark, massive and spherical, like a planet. It was transmitting a signal much like the “Builder” signal.

The probe dutifully reported this fact back to Earth. Within minutes, the world space command was on alert. This was not announced to the public.

Hyperbrain analysts were certain that first contact was imminent. Four teams that were prepared to initiate first contact were teleported to America 2, the lunar base. Protocol dictated that Earth wait for the aliens to initiate contact.

Meanwhile, the vast and deadly framework which had once been pointed at Earth was instead turned spaceward. The American and Soviet directed kinetic weapon systems were prepared to unleash nearly 30 gigatons’ worth of destructive potential on Earth’s enemies at the press of a button.

But for over three hundred days, the ship did nothing.

The Builders (1986)

On April 22, 1986 the Builder “World Ship” vanished from its distant orbit and suddenly appeared inside the orbit of Mercury. It was visible with the naked eye against the sun in many regions of Earth. World governments alerted their citizenry. Riots occurred in many major cities around the world, and more mass suicides occurred. Finally, with Detroit and Los Angeles burning, President Mondale (now in his second term) declared a state of martial law.

Nineteen hours later came the event. Ground stations saw the World Ship pass by Mercury, dwarfing it, and suddenly Mercury itself seemed to break apart, collapsing into a string of debris that slowly thinned into a ribbon of rocks surrounding the sun. Mercury, nearly 5,000 kilometers across at its equator, was gone in seconds.

The World Ship then began moving towards Venus.

After a tense phone call between President Mondale and the new Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko, the two agreed to launch an attack on the World Ship.

Thousands of tons of space rock were hurled by rail guns and Wild Talent abilities at vast speeds towards the World Ship. The first strike alone, scheduled to hit the ship twenty-six days later, was estimated to deliver 10 gigatons’ worth of destructive potential, equivalent to a major worldwide seismic event.

The attack struck the World Ship on Sunday May 18, 1986, devastating the object. The explosive force ejected tons of debris from the World Ship and knocked it from its course to Venus. The huge object, no longer transmitting a signal, spun into a stable orbit between the orbital plane of Venus and the remains of Mercury, and there it sat, inert.

It seemed Earth had won its first conflict against an invader from the stars.

Campaign Setting: The Builder War

In the presented background, the Builders are concerned only with destroying the worlds which surround a star, and fashioning the debris into an artificial ring surrounding it. In their odd alien mindset they are “organizing” the universe, one star at a time.

This does not mean they can’t invade Earth.

Perhaps humanity represents something they have never seen before; perhaps Wild Talents represent some sort of coveted breakthrough in imposing their will over the universe. Maybe they are searching for the power that hides uniquely within the human mind so they can simply “wish” the universe into order.

A full-scale Builder invasion of Earth could span decades or even centuries. Perhaps the attack on the World Ship not only fails to destroy them, it fails to have any effect at all. What would Earth do in the face of such power?

Within days the Builder World Ship could become a new terrifying satellite of Earth, hurling endless ships down to the surface, while mankind, facing extinction, must carry on the fight. Wild Talents will lead the way.

The Ship (1991)

The American-Soviet space program completed a deep space habitat (called *Peace*) to transport a contingent of Hyperbrains and other Wild Talents to the Builder World Ship on July 4, 1991. Several probe flybys had shown that the “ship” appeared dead, with no clear activity on its surface at all.

Hope was rampant that whatever engine had transported the ship into the Solar System could be discovered and unravelled by the world’s brightest minds.



The Builders, in Person (1992)

Months of careful tunneling into the World Ship—renamed *Styx* by Joint Space Command—revealed that the surface, a sea of blasted rock, was simply an armored shell. At first it was thought to be a structure built over a normal planet core. The destructive forces hurled at *Styx* by Earth had turned most of its surface to liquid rock, which had hardened in huge rippling waves of glass.

On January 10, 1992, a Wild Talent team of Soviet, American and British scientists made their first significant discovery: The “planet” was not a planet at all—it was a structure.

Progress was tracked remotely as the team managed to find larger and larger avenues into the ship, heading towards its center. Nothing living was encountered, though several sections of alien machinery seemed to still be operating. As areas were cleared by the exploration team, other, larger investigative teams descended on the structure. It soon became clear it would take decades to explore the structure properly. There were not nearly enough personnel to truly catalog the structure.

On March 3, 1992, near the center of *Styx*, the first biological example of a Builder was discovered, long dead. The seismic violence of the impacts had liquified almost all the Builders near the surface, and only in random areas shielded deep within the ship did anything biological escape absolute elimination. One hundred and forty intact Builder carcasses were recovered and moved to America 2, the lunar base, for extended study.

The Builders are a carbon-based bilaterally symmetrical species. That’s where all comparison to earthly life ends. They are squat, heavy creatures, shaped almost like a pair of legs and hips with a bulbous bullet-shaped head placed squarely in the middle. Their head, which looks somewhat like an avocado, is supported where the hips end, and can either be kept upright facing forward, or down for high-speed movement. Their average height and weight are five feet and 540 lbs.

Coloring varies from bright red to purple. It remains unclear if this is due to decomposition or some other chemical reaction after death. They breathe carbon dioxide and excrete a variety of chemicals, including some inimical to human life.

Campaign Setting: Styx

After summer 1991, a contingent of nearly 1,000 personnel stationed at the deep space habitat Peace continuously worked to explore the Builder's World Ship, *Styx*. Nearly all of these personnel were Wild Talents.

Every square inch of the "ship," 6,123 miles in diameter, was to be searched under the express orders of Joint Space Command. No one knew whether any of the Builders had survived, or if indeed there was anything biological on the ship at all. Still, huge precautions were taken, lead teams were armed, either with powerful Talents or heavy weaponry, just in case of a "close encounter."

Players can take the role of Wild Talent scientists, explorers and artists, sent into the heart of *Styx* to find the secrets of the World Ship at any cost. What secrets—living or otherwise—can they discover at the heart of the greatest threat man has ever known?

Humans and Builders could not share the same atmosphere for very long.

Their "head" has four "lips" that open revealing a crystalline structure which they use for sight. When these lips are closed, four grooves remain open allowing portions of the crystal to poke out (their vision is greatly improved when their "mouths" are open). When their head is held in the "down" position, they can see in four directions at once.

Four to ten "hands" are extendable through grooves in this crystal when their mouth is open. They are multi-bladder prehensile limbs controlled by blood pressure, capable of extreme feats of manual dexterity.

Reproductive organs as they are understood could not be located on any of the carcasses.

'A Lasting Peace for All Mankind' (1992)

President Robert Kennedy and Soviet Leader Konstantin Chernenko met with the heads of state from 26 of the largest world governments in Berne, Switzerland to sign the Berne Accord, a world defense treaty that would make all other treaties before it pale by comparison. This treaty called for mankind to fight the three evils—disease, famine and overpopulation—and not one another. Citizenry "exchanges" began between Soviet and Western states. Restrictions on free speech lightened in the Soviet Union, and anti-Soviet rhetoric vanished from Washington.

Within sixteen months, nearly every government in the world signed the treaty.

Kennedy and Chernenko shook hands, sealing the first steps towards world government on January 1, 1992.

The Pivot on Which the World Turns (1993 to 2000)

"We're caught between killer fish and a race of space contractors. What's next?" *General Tevin Nacht, Israeli Contingent, Joint Space Command, on the confirmation of the existence of the "Fish," January 28, 1998.*

Reconstruction (1993)

Nearly six years of stabilization and reconstruction were necessary following the Builder Invasion to restore most countries—including the United States—to normalcy. Widespread looting, violence, economic collapse and religious mass suicides left a wake of chaos in human lives, wiping out a large portion of most smaller countries' gross domestic product in just a few weeks. By late 1992 life was returning to normal in most First World nations, but the Third World was a different matter.

The U.S. and the Soviet Union announced a program on April 10, 1993 to assist lesser countries in their recovery efforts, many of which would take decades. To those who could see the truth, this was a global “Marshall Plan,” but instead of reconstructing Europe the two super-powers would reconstruct the world. To the paranoid, this was just another attempt for the world to be brought under the sway of the two most powerful nations on the planet.

This extension of the Berne Accord was called the Blueprint.

Rogues (1993)

As the Berne Accord swept the world, pulling in smaller countries to the power offered by world cooperation, dozens of smaller countries closed themselves off to such rhetoric. America and the Soviet Union were eager to include any willing nation in the Berne Accord and the Blueprint plan, granting the poorer and less well off nations access to technology, economic cooperation and, most importantly, a foot-hold in space.

Nearly two dozen countries—most of which had either a dictatorship in power, a familial ruling class or a religious basis—refused to join the growing union of nations. These groups gained the nickname “Rogues” in the following years.

Tactics, however, had changed. America and the Soviet Union no longer enacted trade embargoes, or used threats to bring smaller nations to heel. Instead they steadily and repeatedly approached them with offers, backing off when asked to do so. This huge step in foreign relations was the brainchild of President Robert Kennedy, who was quoted saying:

“We are measured as much for what we do as what we fail to do. We shall force no country’s hand, and we shall make no man a slave to the common good. These nations will join us in time. They will join us because the Accord represents the future. They will join us be-

cause we will be the first to leave this star and communicate with another species. But most of all, they will join us because we are right.”

But “Rogue” nations continued to be a thorn in the side of global stability.

‘American Autonomy’ and Soviet ‘Freedom’ (‘Свобода’)

Despite cooperation on a governmental level, groups in the Soviet Union and the United States opposed the Berne Accord and all it stood for. There were thousands of such groups all along the political spectrum, from violent to benign. But in America and the Soviet Union, two such groups stood above all others in organization and power.

In the United States, “American Autonomy” (sometimes called “Double A”) protested the “integration of Soviet methods into a pure American society.” Though it was not outlawed, it made the FBI and other police agencies very nervous. Its leader, Kurt Schilling—a Wild Talent—would report a membership of nearly 300,000 in 1999. Possessing various Grid newsletters, a growing ministry preaching a unified America against the world, a stockpile of weaponry and its own D-TV channel, AA was a force to be reckoned with. By the end of the century the red, white and blue scrawl of the double A’s could be seen in nearly any major city across the U.S.

Schilling, however, was clever. Attacks by AA members on Soviet nationals were quickly condemned by the ministry, and the ALCU leapt to the defense of Schilling and his methods.

In the Soviet Union, this problem was much worse. The single largest terrorist organization in the world was the Soviet group “Freedom.” Estimated at nearly 1,000,000 members, it cut a swath through Soviet society, from top-level Politburo members right down to factory workers, all of whom lived a secret double life. Unlike AA, “Free-

dom” was absolutely outlawed in the Soviet Union, and the KGB routinely made examples of captured Freedom members.

Freedom members felt America was decadent, was incapable of defending the Earth from attack, and was waiting for the proper moment to launch a sneak attack on Russia. Unlike American Autonomy, Freedom encouraged members to perform violent acts to oppose the “Quiet Invasion” of Americans visiting the Soviet Union. Often, this violence was restricted to Americans and other visiting Westerners.

With the explosion of tourism in formerly closed-off Russia, there were many targets to choose from. By 1998, the FBI and KGB were working in tandem to capture or kill kidnappers, extortionists and terrorists affiliated with Freedom.

The Engine (1993)

On May 9, 1993, a team of Joint Space Command scientists confirmed they had discovered the core of the Builder’s World Ship, the engine which generated the enormous power necessary to hurl the ship interstellar distances.

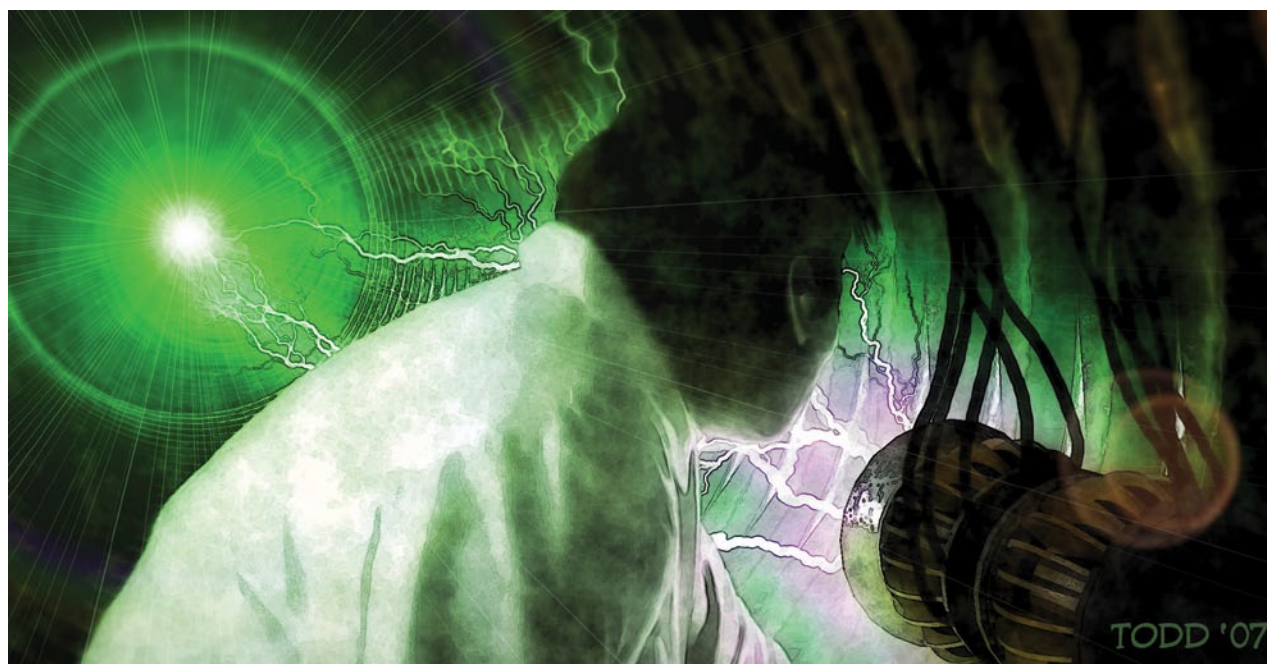
Amazingly, the Builder Engine was no bigger than a football and seemed to be constructed in a manner indicating it was designed to be removed. It was easily transported to America 2 on the lunar surface for study by Soviet, American and British Hyperbrains.

While this fact was publicized, the details of the discovery—and the fruits of investigating it—were not disclosed to the public.

Terror (1994)

On Wednesday July 2, 1994, a lone member of the Jihad, Yaum Al-Qiyamah (“Day of Judgment”) arrived in France from Morocco on a commuter aircraft. The Wild Talent went undetected as he moved in a carefully organized path to Paris. He travelled alone and appeared harmless.

He spent one lone night in the Jardin Hotel across from the Eiffel Tower, where he recorded a message condemning France and the European nations for exploiting and enslaving Muslims for centuries. This video was uploaded to the Grid at 9:00 A.M. the following morning.



At 8:03 A.M., July 3, 1994, Yaum Al-Qiyâmah approached the Eiffel tower across the Jardin du Champ de Mars. France's Police Spéciale were waiting for him. A British intelligence agent with precognition "saw" the likelihood of an attack, and French authorities were alerted and on the scene an hour before the Wild Talent appeared. Unfortunately, Yaum Al-Qiyâmah was the most powerful Talent the Jihad had ever trained. The battle, which lasted more than a half an hour, claimed the lives of all the French Talents and two dozen bystanders; but also managed to clear many other innocents out of the area, perhaps saving hundreds if not thousands of lives.

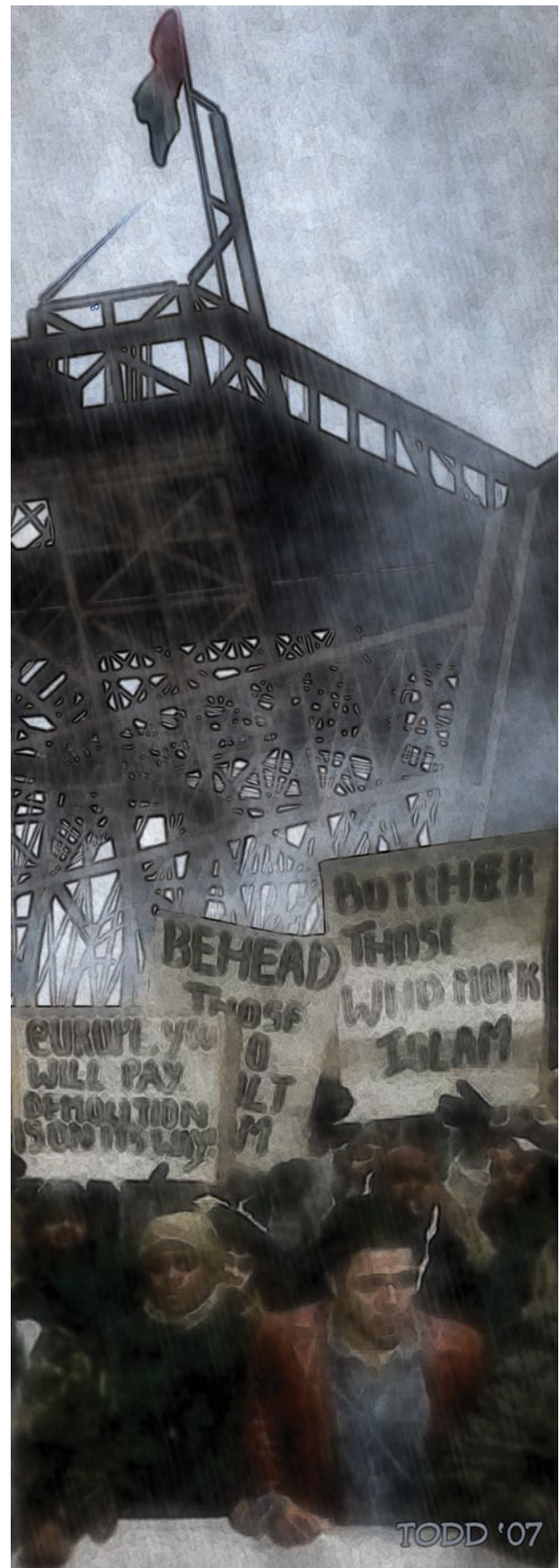
At 9:07 A.M., Yaum Al-Qiyâmah ripped the supports free of the south part of the tower, and sent the structure—along with one hundred and twelve people still in it—toppling onto the Jardin du Champ de Mars, killing two hundred more in the process. The Eiffel tower, a world landmark, was gone.

Arriving minutes later, a consolidated team of Teevees, including Emmanuel "le Professeur" Amadin and George "Unstoppable" Murphy, appeared on the scene. For forty minutes the nine superhumans fought, dragging the battle into the streets of Paris.

At the end, Yaum Al-Qiyâmah was dead, along with six of the nine Teevee members and 452 innocents. It was the single largest, most destructive terrorist act ever carried out to date. Murphy was quoted as saying, "If Rhys was here, I would have had him resurrect the sonofabitch so I could kill him again."

You Can't Stop Religion (1994)

Following the devastating attack on the Eiffel Tower by the Jihad, an organized and general crackdown on religious fundamentalism in over 40 nations of the Berne Accord led to riots, insurgency, bomb attacks, assassinations and worse.



Only the United States and the United Kingdom refused to cooperate in the “police action,” but this did not stop violence from erupting there as well.

Muslim and Christian extremists inflicted the greatest damage, resisting government action to restrict their religious convictions. When France considered expelling those Muslims who failed to swear an oath of allegiance to France in the name of Allah, cities were burned and looted by crazed mobs of Muslim extremists calling for the deposition of the French government. Only martial law managed to restore order to the once-stable country.

In Israel, Christian fundamentalists refused to comply with an armed “request” of the Israeli government, and a prolonged firefight—fueled by fundamentalist Wild Talents—claimed the lives of 140 fundamentalists at the church of Bethlehem. Elsewhere, in Austria, Italy and Spain, similar Christian groups resisted their respective governments, claiming the lives of more than one thousand people all told.

In the U.S. and U.K., violence was more limited but still significant. An American evangelical named Eli Holt shot and killed the Israeli ambassador to the United States on March 2, 1994 before, he himself was killed. In the U.K., a bomb attack on the French Embassy in London killed 116.

President Robert Kennedy, a fervent Catholic, reportedly commented: “There’s nothing more dangerous than any conviction based only in faith.”

Losing Ground (1995)

On October 11, 1995, three dozen rogue nations who had refused the Berne Accord met in Saudi Arabia to discuss the future. These nations referred to themselves as “Sovereign Nations,” and openly disputed the necessity of the Berne Accord.

Led by a collection of Middle Eastern countries but comprising nations from all over the world, the

“League of Sovereign Nations” would meet yearly from that point on. Their first action on record was the condemnation of the Berne Accord, world government and the concept of governmental interference in religious matters.

Many countries that had signed the Berne Accord had large groups within them that disputed it; this first organized and public response to the Accord brought these factions out of the woodwork. Many American, British and Russian nationals backed the League, and many more supported it with violence, espionage and worse.

Requests by diplomats from both the Soviet Union and America to meet with the leaders of the League were politely refused.

Black Sunday (1996)

On Sunday May 26, 1996 at precisely 10:00 A.M. Eastern time, nuclear isomer detonations rocked twelve cities scattered across the globe: Chicago, New York, London, Madrid, Rome, Berlin, Antwerp, Paris, Prague, Moscow, Tokyo and San Francisco,

The blasts claimed the lives of 6,124 people, and devastated any feeling of security the countries of the Berne Accord felt. This was the first time nuclear isomer weapons were used in a terrorist attack, and the blasts—many of which took down high-rise buildings—were significant enough to register across the globe as a seismic event.

Investigation quickly tracked the nuclear-isomer weapons to an American container shipped to the Lebanon partition in 1977, which vanished during transport.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but in response, national security in all affected countries was unified, ironically bringing the Soviet Union, America, the U.K., Belgium, France, Spain, Germany and Japan closer together. The International Police Service was born.

Worldwide Life in the 1990s

Overall, with the fast acceptance of the Berne Accord by many nations, the quality of life spiked worldwide in just a few years, vastly outperforming the previous decades. Former Third World nations which had become First World in the previous decades began turning to help other, less established nations to build up their infrastructure, realizing stable neighbors made for greater prosperity for all.

Overall, the prospect of world government seemed, for the first time, to be a reachable reality. Many nations were desperate to join such an organization for the connection to the global economy that such a bond established.

Many other, smaller nations resisted the Berne Accord and all it stood for. In these countries, there was a definite air of desperation, and their quality of life lagged behind the rest of the world by a measurable degree.

After the turmoil of the Builder Invasion, few were prepared for the world's greatest problem to be religious fundamentalism and terrorism; but with the attacks of the mid-1990s and the crackdown on fundamentalist beliefs in the following years, terror and religious extremism grew.

The U.S. in the 1990s

The United States was seen as one of the pillars of the world, responsible along with the Soviet Union for saving it from certain alien destruction. For the large part, the 1990s were seen as a "golden age" in American politics and economics. World-spanning plans of assistance were put in place to elevate the world to a stable, peaceful place in preparation for possible other threats from the stars. Few could argue such measures weren't necessary, following the comprehension of the power of the Builders.

Warmakers in both the Soviet Union and the U.S. worked together to hone their arsenals into a defense for not just a nation or nations, but for the entire solar system.

Talents

Talents were at the forefront of world exploration and exploitation of space. Mars, the Moon and other long-range missions (such as project FASTWALKER) focused on Wild Talents, men and women who could do the impossible.

Talents were seen (as they always had been, but now even moreso) as the answer to life's problems.

FTL Test (1996)

A human copy of the Builder "Engine" allowed a small space-probe called *Isis* to "jaunt" nearly 0.09 astronomical units instantaneously. This test was highly classified, but was seen as a triumph of the Joint Space Command. Hyperbrains were confident they could not only mass-produce the technology, but that it would be relatively cost effective.

The door was now open to larger, more ambitious FTL projects. The science was understood. It was now time to utilize it.

The Map (1996)

The computer on *Styx*, the Builder World Ship, was activated for the first time by two Hyperbrains who believed they were close to discovering the atmospheric controls of the ship. Instead of regulating the environment, their actions brought up a comprehensive map of Builder space.

Due to the fact that dozens of Hyperbrains had failed to crack the Builder language, even after years of study, little could be learned from the map.

The combined forces of Soviet and American Wild Talents were considered the fuel on which the future safety of the world relied. In secret, thousands of Wild Talents performed dangerous and sometimes fatal tasks in the depths of space in an attempt to cement the security of the Earth indefinitely from the hovering Builder menace.

Crime

Talent crime began to focus in religious fundamentalism and anti-Berne Accord nationalism; catapulting terrorism to the front of the headlines in a new and terrifying way. Superhuman terrorists were the predominant fear of the era, and moves by world governments to contain, control or crush them only backfired.

Even Hyperbrain analysts could not overcome the draw of religion, particularly state-sponsored religious fundamentalism. The cycle of violence, poverty and hate was nearly impossible to overcome through peaceful means. Even worse, anti-Berne Accord terrorists proved to be popular, skilled and, more often than not, experienced in military matters.

Politics

American politics entered an era of “peace through spending.” The huge American economy was shifted to support vast construction programs world-wide to support the possibility of a war against the stars waged on any portion of the Earth.

Disguised as humanitarian and infrastructural improvements in undeveloped regions in actuality, this was a two-pronged assault on poverty and military vulnerabilities. The Soviets likewise joined this process—they had little choice, as they realized that without the American arsenal they could not repel a concerted attack from a powerful alien force.

Soon, even the somber Soviets were welcomed into backwards nations as helpful “big brothers,” and the fear and hatred held against them quickly dissolved—particularly since America was always involved as well.

America, for the most part, was seen as the single most unifying force on the planet, and even in the so-called “Sovereign Nations” it was considered, at worst, meddlesome.

The Safe Bet (1996)

Robert Kennedy ended his second term as president of the United States in 1996, resisting a movement by many supporters to abolish presidential term limits and allow him to run for a third term.

The 1996 U.S. elections hinged on international diplomacy and economics, particularly on domestic and international backlash against the prospects of world government. The presidency was at stake, but the Berne Accord was at issue.

The election settled the presidency with the election of safe-bet candidate Paul Tsongas, a longtime Kennedy ally, with Joseph Robert “Bob” Kerrey of Nebraska as his running mate.

But the Accord would remain controversial, and it would soon become synonymous with an even more controversial program enacted under its terms: United Trade.

Project FASTWALKER (1997)

A top-secret project to build a long-range FTL ship utilizing technology copied from the Builder World Ship began in lunar orbit. The ship, called the *Fastwalker*, was designed for six-month “jaunts” to other star systems.

Though it was not known yet, *Fastwalker's* first destination would be nearly 40 light years outside the solar system.

A.I. Bridge (1997)

Pioneered by the A.I. Adam (long since moved into a fully-mobile self-constructed body), multiple A.I. entities were created in the hopes of understanding the Builder mind-set and perception of the universe. These were called “A.I. Bridges” and were raised in two virtual environments simultaneously, Earth and what was thought to be an environment close to the Builder homeworld. A single common intelligence worked through both sets of problems, one mindset never losing sight of the other. Thus, for the first time, “translation” between the two differing perceptions was possible.

Within sixteen months, the A.I. Bridge had given Joint Space Command incredible insights into the Builders’ language, allowing the first successful translation of writing found on the World Ship. Ominously, the phrase “Disorder, Destruction, Reorder” was found repeated throughout the ship.

Adam and the A.I. Bridge stepped up their examination of the Builder’s computer, translating reams of data per second, where, in the past, dozens of Hyperbrains would spend weeks laboring to translate a single letter.

ETR Defense (1998)

Over the course of a year, 3,520 ETR defense satellites were FTL'd from lunar orbit to form a rough sphere around the Solar System. Each satellite was awash with a huge array of self-repairing sensors, as well as an Entanglement Transmitter/Receiver

International Police Service

Replacing the rather small and sometimes ineffective “Interpol,” this huge interweaving of existing internal intelligence services linked eight of the largest and most powerful world governments together in a web of law enforcement treaties. Many other, smaller Berne Accord countries cooperated as well, but the majority of actions were carried out by one of the “eight.”

In the U.S., in Washington, D.C., a special division of the Justice Department served as one-third of the headquarters and logistics of the IPS. Called International Crimes Division, it housed many former members of Interpol, the FBI and more. The other two-thirds of the IPS were based in London and Moscow.

By 2000, IPS was a force to be reckoned with. Its members were concerned with one thing: Preserving safety in the member nations of the Berne Accord.

in constant contact with Joint Space Command on Earth, Syrtis Major and America 2.

This classified network was given the codename ARCHANGEL. It was the first real-time Solar System early-warning system.

The Three-Term President (1998)

Paul Tsongas’ presidential career lasted less than two years. He had successfully fought cancer years before, but he suffered a fierce relapse in 1997. Unprecedented efforts by Talent medical specialists inexplicably made no headway against the disease, which seemed to return, stronger than ever, each time they thought it was cured. Tsongas stepped down in favor of Vice President Bob Kerrey in 1998.

Kerrey would see reelection in 2000, after largely successful U.S.-Soviet efforts to build economic infrastructure throughout the Third World, and an even more successful public relations campaign that marginalized opponents to the Berne Accord; and again, in a much more heated and desperate campaign, in 2004. He would end his long presidential career by leaving office a year early amid a controversy of global scale.

The Shift (1998)

On December 12, 1998 transmissions from the nearest Builder star, Epsilon Eridani, suddenly changed in frequency, interval and content. Examination by the A.I. Bridge revealed that a warning had been raised within the Builder's interstellar empire. This, of course, was kept classified.

The message read as follows: "Order of Star EN-OCA (the Sun) fail. Talk with ADOI (the World Ship) fail. Recall of ADOI fail. More ADOI. More Order. End."

It became very clear to Joint Space Command that more Builders were coming. It was only a matter of time.

Fish Space (1998)

Translation of the Builder map continued, revealing an area of disputed space where the Builders had apparently met an equally advanced combative species that had successfully held their "ground" for nearly 300 years. This species seemed to be aquatic (or at least, living in a liquid of unknown type) quickly gaining them the nickname "Fish."

The Fish homeworld appeared to be in the HD 69830 system, nearly 42 light years from Earth, located on a large, Earth-like planet covered in a carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere.

This information was deeply classified.





HD 69830 (1999)

After months of endless debate between the governing nations of the Joint Space Command, and after an exhaustive report on the “Fish” was compiled by an A.I. Bridge, Hyperbrain analysts concerned about the possibility of another Builder attack on the Solar System put forth the possibility of “contacting” the Fish in the hopes of an alliance. At first this plan was lost in committee, with many members of Joint Space Command concerned that Earth could find itself in two interstellar conflicts instead of just one, but soon the plan was put into motion.

Fastwalker, parked in lunar orbit for two years, was rapidly prepared for its first “jaunt” out of the Solar System. Its crew of two dozen Wild Talents, four artificial intelligences and three “normals”—a scattering of ethnicities from the Berne Accord nations—represented Earth’s best hope in establishing a rapport with the “Fish”.

This project, however, remained deeply classified. The most powerful governments on Earth were not eager to inform the world that not only were they not in control, but that the entire Solar System was trapped between two warring cultures that Hyperbrains estimated to each be nearly 500,000 years old. The report informed the JSC an 84% likelihood that the Fish would parlay with Earth.

No one wanted to consider what possibilities the other 16% entailed.

A Bang or a Whimper (2000 to present)

“Our world was thrust into a war not of its choosing, and human beings of many nations fought this war with courage, gallantry and determination. They fought not for glory, but for their families. For their world. For you and for me. Their battle brought us hope for peace among the stars.” *President Bob Kerrey’s “Worlds at War” address, shortly before his 2007 impeachment hearings.*

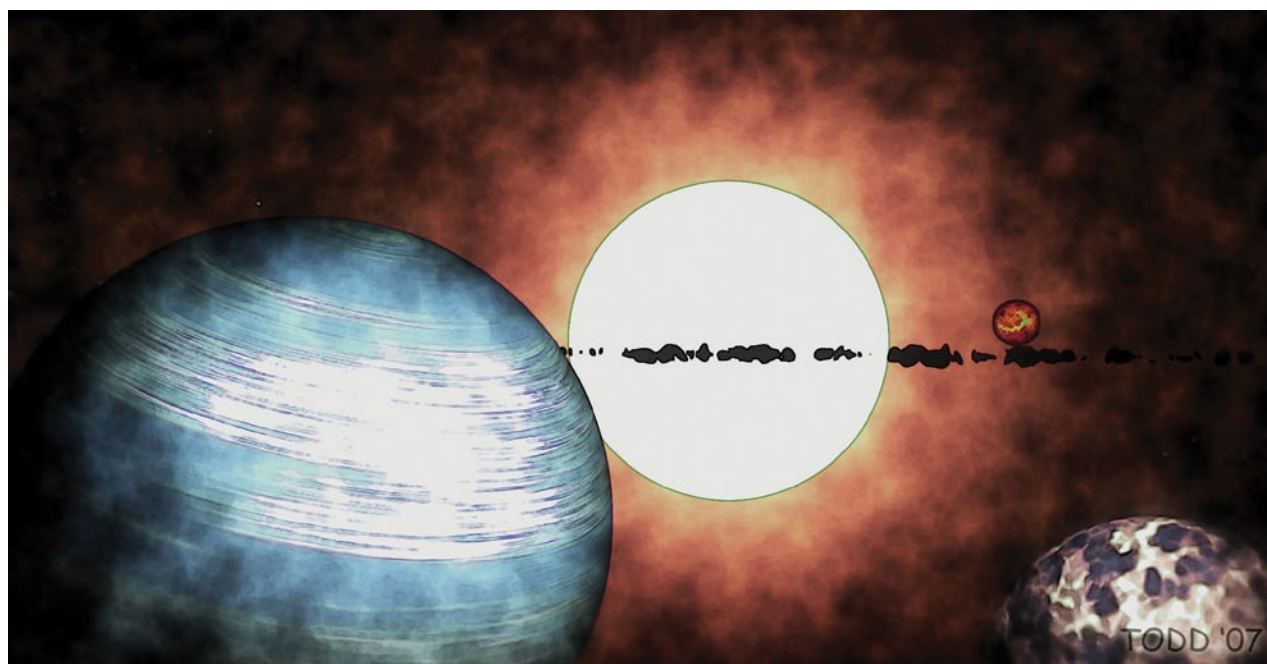
Contact (2000)

Fastwalker made its first “jaunt” into interstellar space on Friday, March 3, 2000, vanishing from lunar orbit and reappearing on the fringes of the HD 69830 system more than 41 light years away. When *Fastwalker’s* captain issued Earth’s first interstellar ETR transmission—“Control, we have made the jump and all is well”—mission control on the lunar base America 2 erupted in cheers. The news would not be made public until 2007.

The orange dwarf star HD 69830 is just visible to the naked eye from Earth. It is in the constellation Puppis (the Stern), near Canis Major and Hydra. Its system includes a massive asteroid belt, three planets about the mass of Neptune, and one watery, Earth-like planet. According to the Builder map, this was the homeworld of the aquatic species nicknamed the Fish. Earth scientists dubbed it Oceanus.

Fastwalker remained in distant orbit around the star, studying the system and sending constant reports through Entanglement Transmitter/Receivers to Earth. According to signals analysis the system included five inhabited worlds: Oceanus, one of Oceanus’ two moons, and three moons of the system’s largest planet, which the humans called Pontus. In addition there were dozens of space stations around the inhabited worlds and throughout the system.

Talents examining the Fish from afar reported them to be a vast array of individual species of varying size and sentience, using technology that seemed primarily organic in nature.



Beyond those facts, though, *Fastwalker* learned little. The A.I. Bridges had spent the last few years attempting to decipher signals from the system with inconclusive results. They knew from interpretations of the Builder map that the Fish had fought the Builders in this region of space for 300 years, but the techniques by which they had come to interpret the Builder language yielded no results in Fish signals. They concluded that the Fish language was impressively complex and sophisticated—that it was probably in fact an array of distinct languages—which relied heavily on key metaphors and internal references that left it wholly resistant to outside interpretation.

Three Solar days after *Fastwalker's* arrival, another vessel suddenly appeared alongside it. This vessel was a large, irregular jumble of metal and opaque crystalline structures, and it extruded a bridge to link the two ships. Video feeds transmitted constantly to Earth as *Fastwalker's* crew nervously prepared for first contact with an alien species.

Fastwalker shuddered slightly as the alien bridge made contact with its hull. A quiet minute passed. Then in a frenzy of shouting and background screams, *Fastwalker's* captain ordered a full lockdown and began issuing protocols for an emergency jaunt out of the system. And then all signals from *Fastwalker* ceased.

Earth's first starship would not be seen again for three years.

The Earth Defense Fleet (2001)

With the disappearance of *Fastwalker* in Fish space, the Joint Space Command could only assume that its members' worst fears were confirmed: The Earth now faced two enemies from the stars. Despite Earth's encounter with the Builders, however, humanity was unprepared to face an aggressive, utterly alien enemy. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. cobbled together an ad-hoc international—interstellar—command structure.

The Fish

There was no single Fish species. The civilization nicknamed the Fish included countless aquatic species that arose on a single world. Aboard their own vessels and in their own bases the Fish swam in a liquid environment that emulated their homeworld's sea, but over hundreds of centuries they developed specific member species that were genetically tailored to function in a variety of gravities and atmospheres, including some quite similar to Earth's.

The Fish most often seen in person by Talents of the Earth Defense Fleet had such adaptations: spiny, dense-skinned creatures with thick, muscular limbs suited almost as well for the corridors of Earth's ships as for the waters of their own. They carried bony, crystalline tools and weapons that seemed more likely grown than manufactured, and manipulated them with strong, dextrous tendrils.

Other Fish aboard their own vessels and bases took every conceivable size and shape, from tiny, half-sentient harvesters to massive whale-sized creatures that seemed to constitute the guiding leadership of the strange Fish society.

Work immediately began in distant Solar orbit on three new interstellar vessels, larger than *Fastwalker* and armed with an array of mass drivers and nuclear missiles. The first of these enormously expensive vessels, christened *Poseidon*, launched in deep secrecy in 2001, one year after the disappearance of *Fastwalker*. The second, *Triton*, launched in 2002. The third, *Nereid*, launched in 2004.

With *Poseidon's* launch, American and Soviet Talents took the front lines in Earth's first open war among the stars.



The Fish War (2001)

The Fish war, fought at first with the lone Earth vessel *Poseidon*, was unlike anything humanity had expected. *Poseidon's* mission was to launch attack after attack, diverting all the attention of the enemy in order to prevent a Fish excursion to Earth. Talent precognitives, remote sensors, and staggeringly complex artificial intelligences provided intelligence and determined the most critical targets. *Poseidon* struck bases in the Fish home system and throughout Fish space. Each attack was followed by weeks of maneuvering to evade Fish assault fleets.

Each time *Poseidon* jaunted to a new attack, a small number of powerful Talents used their powers offensively. One could disintegrate vast amounts of inorganic material, reducing it to its component atoms. Another could increase gravity around a distant localized point until molecular pressure triggers a nuclear reaction. Another could teleport nuclear bombs to distant targets. Others used teleportation-based weapons built by Hyperbrains based on the Builder engine, which they still barely understood; theoretical research came to a standstill with so many Talents committed to fighting the war.

Joint Space Command doctrine called for avoiding contact and destroying Fish targets from a distance. The Fish, for their part, attempted to fight an up-close war, all their technologies dedicated to establishing physical contact. The men and women of *Poseidon's* Defense Corps trained ceaselessly to repel invaders with every kind of weapon, from individual Talent powers to conventional weapons firing recoilless Talent-invented Happy Bullet Lightning Rounds (TM)—developed by a civilian Filipino-Japanese conglomerate to fit legacy slugthrowers that once depended on gunpowder—but *Poseidon* jaunted into and away from each engagement just before contact.

Each battle was a dance of instant interstellar jumps and atomic infernos, with Talent precognition barely one step ahead of Fish intuition.

United Trade (2001)

The U.S. and the Soviet Union led, cajoled and pushed the nations of the Berne Accord in creating an aggressive program of economic development called United Trade, a byzantine conglomeration of multinational agencies and economic think-

Worldwide Life in the 2000s

The world saw a steady economic downturn in the 2000s. After the growth of the 1990s many blamed the trouble on incompetent administration of the wide-reaching United Trade program, which was criticized robustly in the U.S. by Republicans skeptical of the capacity of even Hyperbrains to manage all the dizzyingly complex factors of a world economy. That argument failed to take root—the public could point to Hyperbrain accomplishments in the confrontation with the Builder ship as evidence of their skill—but opposition to United Trade grew.

An American public accustomed to the savviness of Hyperbrains felt that only corruption could explain the program's failures, but the popular Kerrey administration and the entrenched Soviet leadership alike seemed to keep constant faith in it. To the League of Sovereign Nations, the troubled world economy was clear evidence of the danger of trusting an alliance between the two great world powers, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

Life in the U.S. in the 2000s

Economic constrictions, inflation and recession, combined with the expansion, militarization, and

steadily-deepening secrecy of the American-Soviet space program, caused growing American discontentment with the status quo throughout the decade. President Kerrey retained a popularity that was inexplicable to his critics, but even many of his supporters felt that his devotion to international cooperation, particularly in the space program and United Trade, undermined his and his predecessors' accomplishments.

Sociologists meanwhile pointed to widespread dissatisfaction as the cause of rampant conspiracy theories. Rumors and speculation about the Missing and about sinister, secret Joint Space Command programs occupied tremendous expanses of the Grid long before the truth was shown to be more terrifying than the theories.

Talents

Americans continued to look to Talents for solutions to inextricable problems, but those solutions became rarer and rarer over the decade. Many Talents who had been famous for their innovations simply vanished, some with announcements that they wanted to enjoy well-earned private retirements, others

tanks. United Trade used tools such as tariffs and tax incentives to drive international commerce between the more established (and often reluctant) first-world countries and the rest of the world. The promise of United Trade was worldwide economic growth, which was expected in turn to have long-term benefits for every participating country.

The results fell short of the promises. Many third-world countries benefited immediately from increased trade, only to see their economies become unstable again as commodities failed to move between nations with the dispatch that the project

promised. Wealthy countries balked resentfully at the intrusive policies of the program's extensive bureaucracies, and loudly questioned their true motives.

Very few people on Earth realized that United Trade was primarily a front for the war effort. The leaders of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were convinced by batteries of Hyperbrain researchers that public knowledge of the Fish crisis would destabilize the world economy and cripple their ability to fight the first war in which the existence of humanity itself is at stake. As United Trade worked to promote international commerce, the benefits of that trade were

with no explanation at all. Rumors and conspiracy theories surrounded “the Missing,” as they were soon dubbed, and many blamed the vanishings themselves for the decade’s ills.

Talents with modest powers, meanwhile—the sort called “Duds” back in World War II—found their skills in higher demand as their high-profile colleagues and competitors left the field. Some snarky news agencies dubbed them “Mild Talents” for their unspectacular abilities, but they found increasingly hungry markets for their powers. Headhunters for powerful corporations and government agencies became expert, and very wealthy, in finding just the right Talent for just the right job. Sometimes, after all, even a minor miracle is worth more than gold. And even so, a great many “Duds” vanished as well.

Crime

Opposition to the United Trade program punctuated longstanding resistance to the Berne Accord among American isolationists and nationalists. They never quite became politically mainstream, however, even as the years of secrecy and rumors wore on; attacks by groups such as the U.S.S.R.’s Freedom and dozens of others consistently alienated and angered the public that they meant to intimidate and manipulate.

For public spectacle and sheer carnage, terrorist attacks in the 2000s never matched the 1994 destruction of the Eiffel Tower or 1996’s Black Sunday, but they came with greater and greater frequency. Thirty dead here, 70 wounded there—terrorist bombings and Talent attacks became a sad commonplace in international news.

Politics

The U.S. president’s policies in the 1990s were labelled “peace through spending.” In the 2000s the U.S., the Soviet Union, and third-world countries alike all saw rising terrorism and increasing economic turmoil, as the fruits of improved trade were redirected into secret military programs. Opponents came up with a new watchword: “poverty through spending.” They exaggerated the economic situation, to be sure—the world at large and the U.S. in particular were financially better off than at any time in history—but American and Soviet leaders were increasingly derided for propping up failed international programs. This came to a head near the end of the decade, when the U.S.-Soviet secret programs became public knowledge at last.

redirected to fund U.S. and Soviet covert space programs and to keep concealed the war in the stars.

The Missing (2002)

As the Fish war heated up, powerful Talents around the world began vanishing. Conspiracy theories rapidly spread on the Grid, with countless nodes dedicated to the search for this or that missing Talent.

As time passed it became clear that many more Talents had gone missing than the ones whose worried families made the news; a far greater num-

ber disappeared who had few ties or who moved frequently and were accustomed to being out of touch with their loved ones for months at a time.

The truth was more spectacular than any of the theories: Earth’s third interstellar vessel, *Triton*, jaunted away in May 2002 to join *Poseidon* in the war. Wild Talents’ superhuman Willpower, even in the least powerful, was crucial to the large-scale manufacturing and use of superpowered weapons. Talents around the world had been secretly recruited to fight a holding action against the Fish.

The Opposition (2003)

As impoverished countries saw far fewer improvements than the proponents of the United Trade program projected, backlash began against world government and the leading Berne Nations' infrastructure of secrecy. The League of Sovereign Nations quickly took the forefront. Rumors spread that the Joint Space Command was undertaking some massive program in outer space, and the League quickly concluded that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were establishing space-based weapon systems that jointly targeted opponents to their shared hegemony. The League's leaders demanded answers and explanations. They got none.

Fastwalker Returns (2003)

Triton and *Poseidon* worked in tandem to great effect from mid-2002 to early 2003. By supporting each other they more than doubled *Poseidon's* previous strike tempo. In March 2003, after striking a Fish base at Beta Hydri, *Triton* jaunted away into deep space. Incredibly, after the jaunt it spotted the missing vessel *Fastwalker* less than one astronomical unit away.

Fastwalker showed signs of extensive damage but appeared to have power and life support systems. Remote sensing Talents aboard *Triton* immediately turned their powers toward the battered ship—and then alerts sounded throughout *Triton* as intruders appeared, teleported over by a Talent aboard *Fastwalker*. The intruders were the missing humans of *Fastwalker*, but they attacked *Triton's* crew with Fish weapons. Chaos reigned for ten minutes. Then *Triton*, like *Fastwalker* before it, ceased all communication.

Exploring Distant Stars (2003)

Hyperbrain Talents issued a report based on years-long explorations of the stars beyond Fish space. They used increasingly esoteric combinations of entanglement reading and Talent clairvoyance, in

Campaign Setting: The Fish War

The Fish war is a prime candidate for starfaring Wild Talents adventures. Fish war campaigns can take many shapes. Most engagements of the war were brief, deadly attacks with strategic weapons, one of Earth's massive ships launching a strike before jaunting away to safety. A grim campaign could emphasize not the battles with the Fish—which are the occasional desperate punctuations to the events of the game—but the toll that years of constant strikes and near escapes take on the Talents aboard Earth's vessels, the thousands of superpowered men and women sworn for the sake of Earth to abandon all contact with their loved ones back home and devote all their crumbling will to this secret war.

Each of Earth's ships maintained a complement of highly-trained Joint Space Command Defense Corps soldiers, whose job was to defend the vessel against invaders. But actual shipboard combat was rare. Their primary day-to-day mission was security, especially (from 2003 onward) vigilance against Talent mutiny and the threat of Fish infiltration. The inevitable conflicts between well-meaning men and women in such circumstances could be the heart of the campaign, with the stakes made palpable by genuine Fish incursions.

A more dashing game could posit a secret mission to star systems beyond Fish space. The Joint Space Command officially rejected any such mission, but who knows what some factions might attempt in their growing desperation? Talent explorers could set out to study and contact baffling alien civilizations, hoping to find some new means of opposing the Fish.

missions meant to find some kind of “secret weapon” among the stars that could be used against the Fish.

They described distant regions of space where alien civilizations seemed to have made peace with the Fish, in every case after an initial stretch of debilitating warfare. Each civilization that made peace fought the Fish to a standstill and maintained its capacity to do so into the present. What none of them had in common was exactly how long it took to fight the Fish down, and none of the Hyperbrains in the report could discern what might have triggered each final rapprochement.

American and Soviet leaders, disappointed, largely ignored the report. Most claimed it was nonsense, that the whole remote viewing program was misguided. The rest said that even if it were perfectly accurate, the report changed nothing. Earth had no clue how to end the war with the Fish. When the war exhausted its roster of fighting Talents, the Earth would be helpless.

The Battle for *Poseidon* (2003)

In August 2003 a Fish ship finally managed to engage *Poseidon* in close assault, latching on with a bridge over which Fish soldiers invaded the Earth vessel. The battle for *Poseidon* raged for 30 minutes in the outermost levels of the ship.

Fish weapons didn’t kill their targets, they infected them—a human victim typically went into violent convulsions for about one minute, then fought to defend the Fish invaders. After the lessons of *Fastwalker* and *Triton*, however, the Defense Corps was ready. Again and again, grim-faced soldiers killed their former friends and colleagues alongside the alien Fish, and the Fish raid failed to take hold.

Finally a Defense Corps team demolished the Fish ship’s extruded bridge and *Poseidon* jaunted away, leaving behind a cluster of isomer bombs to destroy the Fish assault ship.

Hyperbrains at once began studying the corpses of the Fish, the infested humans, and Fish technology. And almost as soon as they began, several were themselves infected, suborned in the mere act of tinkering with the Fish equipment. After another hour of chaos, four researchers were dead and another three were locked in quarantine. *Poseidon*’s crew worked very slowly and carefully to disassemble and study Fish weapons and corpses in complete isolation.

They concluded that Fish weapons changed victims at the genetic level. The Fish all probably originated on a single world, their numerous species inextricably linked by genetic engineering technologies developed over hundreds of thousands of years. They conquered by infestation and mutation.

Analysts pointed again to distant signals, from beyond the cloud of Fish stars, that appeared to live near the Fish in peace. Considering Earth’s track record of first contact with aliens, the Joint Space Command firmly rejected proposals to send *Poseidon* to investigate those civilizations more closely.

Freedom at United Trade (2004)

A team from the enormous Soviet terrorist group Freedom, secretly sponsored by a consortium of Politburo members (and, unknown to the terrorists, by members of the League of Sovereign Nations), infiltrated the United Trade program’s headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Their goal was to find proof of the program’s misdeeds, share that proof on the Grid to demonstrate the program’s violations of Soviet ideals, and punish United Trade’s leaders with spectacular violence.

The mission fell apart when a United Trade security sweep detected the unreported Talent power of one of the team members. Several team members were apprehended; others escaped; two were killed attempting to invade the United Trade data vault by force; and security forces disarmed a small nuclear isomer bomb the invaders had attempted

to detonate. The affair ultimately bought a modicum of much-needed sympathy for United Trade, and increased public censure for Freedom.

United Trade officials kept quiet the fact that the sweep that detected the invaders, and the force that killed the last of them, were not U.T. security personnel or International Police Service officers, but members of the Talent Volunteers working for United Trade under a private and very secret agreement.

***Nereid* (2004)**

Earth's fourth interstellar vessel, *Nereid*, launched from distant Solar orbit in July 2004 and joined the war against the Fish. Like *Triton* before it, *Nereid* proved a capable partner for the beleaguered *Poseidon*.

Countdown (2004)

With vast international resources secretly redirected to the Fish war, the economic miracles promised in the Berne Accord and the United Trade program failed to materialize. All the efforts of American and Soviet leaders to maintain the secrecy of the war, and the fates of thousands of missing Talents, had begun to wear thin; the Joint Space Command knew it was in a race to make peace with the Fish before knowledge of the war became public. The leaders of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. alike remained convinced that public knowledge of the Fish war would lead to worldwide depression, chaos, and ultimately conquest by invaders from the stars.

The Builders Advance (2005)

As the Fish war raged, Talent observers watched and reported helplessly as the Builder threat spread and nearby stars that flickered with signals of intelligent life switched to the Builder signal. Nearly 20 years after Earth's destruction of a single Builder ship, the Builders had half-encircled the Solar system with their distant conquests.

Like the Fish, the Builders defied all attempts at true understanding. Artificial intelligences were

Campaign Setting: The Teevees Today

While many of the world's most powerful Talents were away in the secret war against the Fish, thousands of other Talents remained on Earth, from criminals and terrorists whom the Joint Space Command would never approach to men and women who, for whatever reason, did not get called into space.

The Talent Volunteers were very active throughout the 2000s, making a reluctant, tacit agreement with the American and Soviet governments to keep the war secret in order to maintain stability on Earth. The Teevees protected United Trade and Joint Space Command facilities, while at the same time some members quietly infiltrated those facilities to confirm for their own consciences' sakes that the dreadful secrets were in a good cause. A Teevees campaign could blend opposition to terrorism and quiet sabotage of despotic regimes with superpowered industrial espionage and black operations in support of or opposition to the Fish war.

A long-term campaign could get a great deal of mileage from presenting the secrets of the war only in piecemeal, starting with ridiculous rumors and over the course of months or years encompassing the terrible truth.

more effective than humans at reading Builder communications and motivations, but only up to limits that they could never break: The more an A.I. became capable of empathy with any kind of other intelligence, the less it was able to understand the Builders.

Humans could read the Builders' motivations only in their actions: Disorder. Destruction. Reorder.



***Poseidon's Wake* (2005)**

After months of maneuvering, the Earth fleet finally fell for a Fish trap that it couldn't evade. *Poseidon* and *Nereid* jaunted away from a strike against a Fish base at HD 70642 only to reappear inside a cluster of ten heavy Fish vessels and dozens of Fish assault ships—including the captured *Fastwalker* and *Triton*. Talents serving the Fish teleported at once to *Nereid* and *Poseidon* while Fish assault ships race toward the two Earth vessels.

On *Nereid*, Private First Class Wilkins Unruh of the Defense Corps—previously known for a seemingly useless Talent to alter the probabilities of dice throws, and *only* dice throws—caused the enemy Talents to appear far from their targets, scattered throughout and outside the ship: in the galleys, in the showers, in the vacuum just outside the lower airlock. This blunted the initial invasion and gave *Nereid* crucial minutes to attack the Fish fleet. In *Nereid's* counterattack half of the incoming Fish assault ships exploded in nuclear fire.

Poseidon, distracted by the hostile Talents, was not so lucky. Explosions throughout its propulsion system wracked the huge ship, and Fish assault

ships swung into place around it. As *Nereid's* Defense Corps battled on its outer decks to throw off the invaders, *Poseidon's* communications systems went black, one after another.

Joint Space Command ordered *Nereid* to withdraw. *Nereid's* commander, Admiral Helen Perryman, refused. *Nereid* turned its mass drivers on the ships surrounding *Poseidon*, blasting several away. Five minutes later, *Poseidon's* longtime captain, Admiral Ruben Sharov, sent a coded signal that he intended to destroy *Poseidon*, preferring to see the ship die than become a weapon against humanity. In the middle of Sharov's transmission, the last of *Poseidon's* communications cut out. Its bombs remained unactivated.

Nereid, heavily mauled in its fight to throw off the Fish—damaged far more by its own weapons fired at close quarters than by theirs—finally began preparations to jaunt away. Defense Corps Col. Laila Saure obtained Perryman's permission to make one last attempt on *Poseidon's* behalf. Saure, clutching a nuclear isomer bomb, teleported into *Poseidon's* engine room.

As *Nereid* jaunted away, Col. Saure detonated the bomb, sparking a chain reaction in *Poseidon's* Builder engine. Saure had intended to cause a nuclear explosion to destroy *Poseidon*. In fact the Builder engine's detonation created an unstable black hole. It immediately exploded in a staggering burst of gamma rays, annihilating Saure, *Poseidon*, the renegades *Fastwalker* and *Triton*, and the entire Fish fleet.

Parley (2006)

The *Nereid*, gutted, returned to the Sol system for repairs that it simply couldn't undertake in space, and the Joint Space Command braced itself for an invasion. Weeks passed, and the invasion never came.

Instead, one of the Entanglement Transmitter/Receiver satellites in distant solar orbit picked up a message keyed specifically for it. For the first time, the Fish were communicating with Earth.

Their ambassador was Edgar Thome, former JSC lieutenant commander aboard *Fastwalker*, a Talent with an impressive long-distance influence on gravity. How Thome had survived *Fastwalker's* demise, he didn't say; clearly he had not been aboard for the ship's final flight. Nor did he express any regret or explanation for his loyalty to the Fish. It was as if he had been fighting for them all his life.

Through Thome, the Fish sued for peace.

The aliens, it seems, had had enough. Hyper-brain estimates placed Fish casualties from the war in the billions; Fish vessels ruptured by Earth-sent nuclear bombs and Talent-accelerated mass drivers boiled millions away into space at a time.

But the casualties did not seem to be the issue. The Fish, unlike the humans, certainly didn't seem to hold any grudge over their losses. They were immediately ready to enter an alliance against the Builders and any other interstellar threats that may appear.

The Fish, represented by their human ambassador, seemed baffled by the concept of explaining themselves. One moment they were at war; the

next they were humanity's most powerful friends. To the Fish it all seemed self-evident.

Some human diplomats theorized that the Fish were now satisfied that the humans could survive threats such as the Builders, and that made them worthy of alliance rather than conquest. Others believed the Fish thought exclusively in terms of biological evolution. Others feared the Fish believed they had enough physical contact with humanity to work some undetected genetic mutation that would soon spread beyond human ability to check it. Debate continues to this day.

It took five years of slaughter, but the Fish were willing to parley after all.

'Endless Secrets and Lies' (2007)

As Talents returned to Earth after years spent at war between the stars, the word finally broke. At first it was a slew of Grid rumors, quickly discounted; but then, inevitably, Talents sworn by their governments to secrecy began to talk.

Over the course of a month the scope of the war came to light: Inconceivably vast amounts of money redirected without public knowledge or oversight. Three of Earth's four secret starships destroyed. Human dead numbering 20,000 Talents and 80,000 non-Talents in 14 battles of a five-year illegal war—not including the numbers not killed but suborned by the Fish. And experts claimed that toll was lighter than it should have been.

With the news that the human race had already made peace with this new threat from the stars there was little of the mass panic seen after the Builder incursion, but the backlash was immediate and widespread. The League of Sovereign Nations claimed that years of international rebuilding amounted to a single great effort to expand U.S.-Soviet domination beyond even the boundaries of Earth. Their argument gained ground quickly among smaller nations who had until then been allies with the Americans and the Soviets, struggling to make the terms of the

United Trade program work, but who had been left in the dark regarding the Fish war.

Opponents of the Kerrey administration seized on the opportunity to call the popular president on the carpet for, as one Republican leader put it, “endless secrets and lies in the service of unaccountable arrogance and overreaching power.” Impeachment hearings began six months after Earth made peace with the Fish.

Hoping to preserve his party’s three-decade hold on the White House, Kerrey left office a year early, just before a series of increasingly rancorous impeachment hearings could come to a vote.

Kerrey’s longtime vice president, former Tennessee Senator Al Gore, would spend one tenuous year in the Oval Office before facing the most bitter election of recent American history.

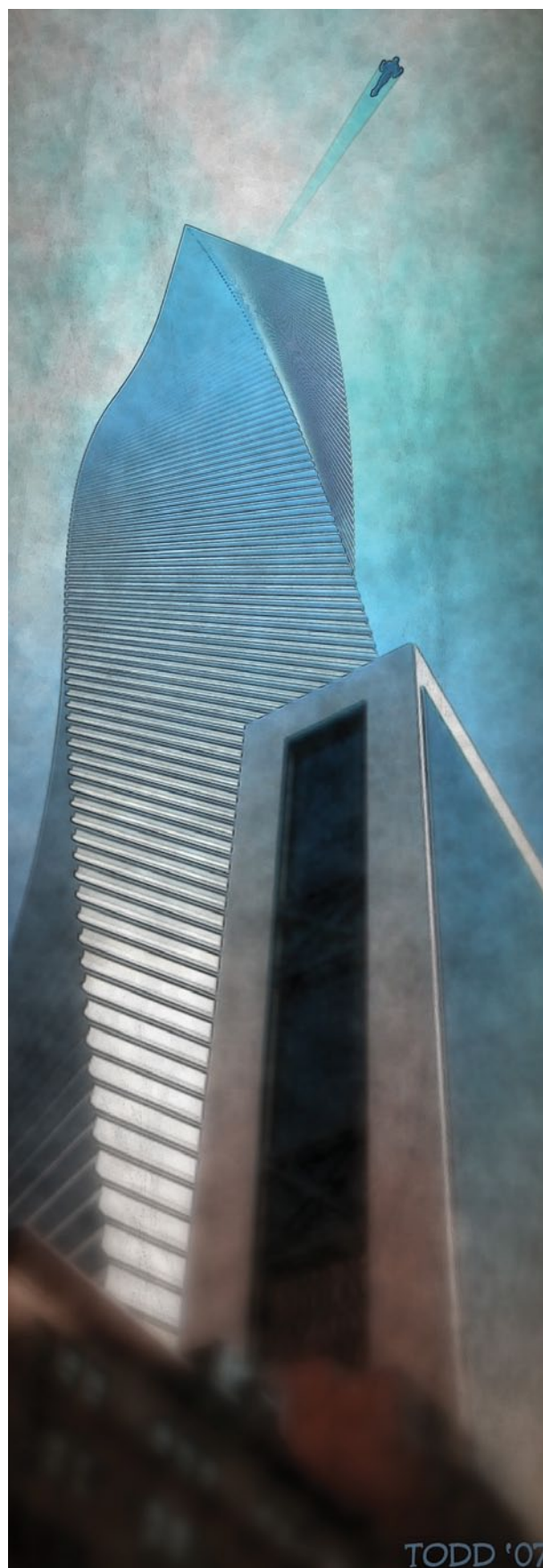
In 2008 Republicans gained a rare victory in the U.S. presidential elections, riding a powerful wave of isolationist, anti-globalization sentiment that at last became overwhelming in the wake of the scandals over the Fish War—just as the U.S. was making its first tentative alliance with a culture not even from the Earth.

The Road Ahead

We end the timeline of Wild Talents here, with mankind scarred by its first full-scale war with an alien species and facing the return of a far worse alien threat. The secrets of the Fish war threaten to divide the world, east from west, First World from Second and Third.

What price will the Earth pay for its peace with the Fish? What opportunities are ahead as humanity at large begins to explore the stars? We leave those questions to you. Aliens, magic, super-science, and the power of the human mind over all are there for players to explore.

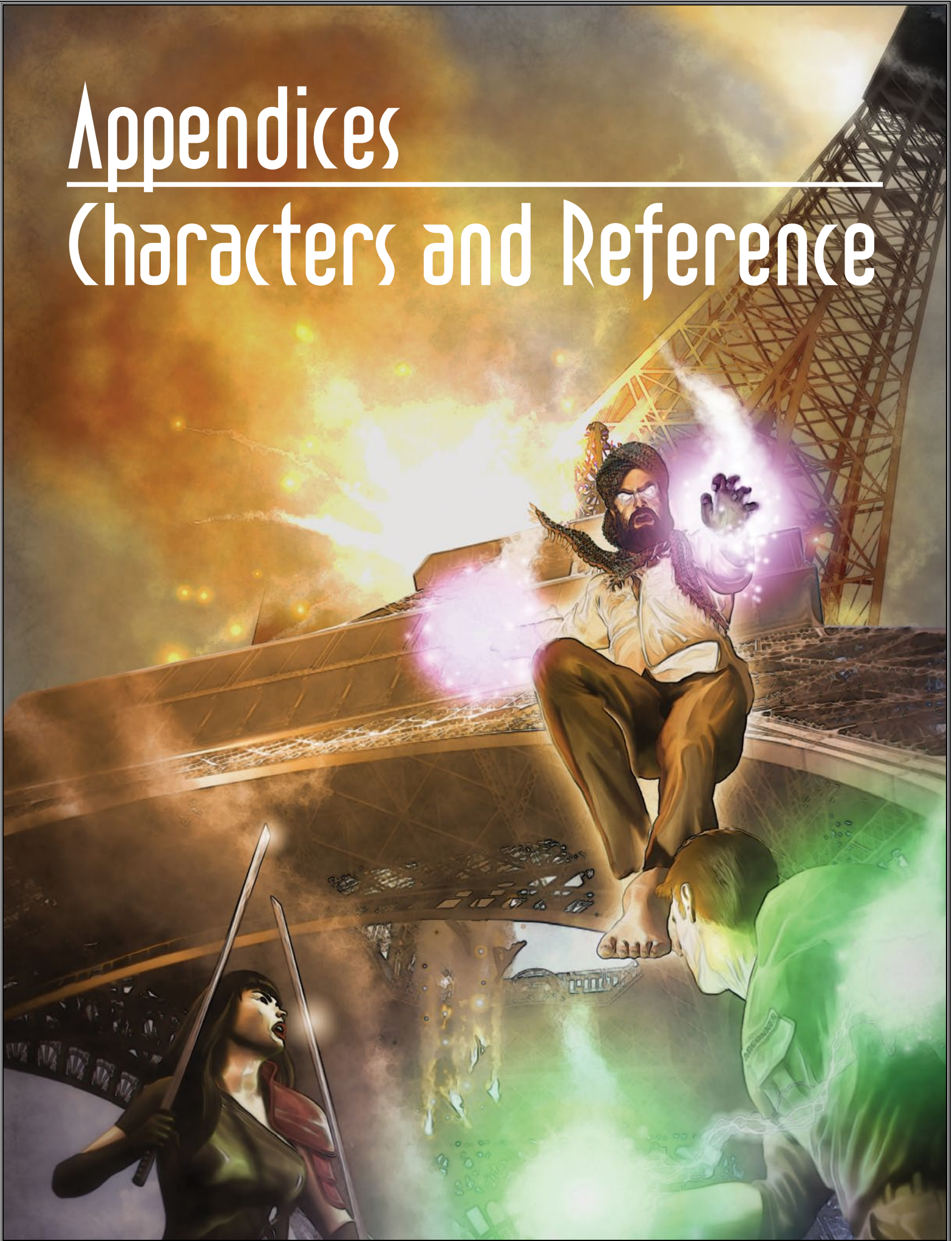
In the World Gone Mad nothing is impossible, and the only limit is imagination itself.



TODD '07

Appendices

Characters and Reference



Appendix A: Sample Characters

Grey—The First Wild Talent (circa 1947)

See page 228 for background details.

Point Total

200 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (61 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Brains 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Cool 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 4

Willpower 5 (1 pt)

Motivations: Loyalty to England (2); Passion for fame (2).

Skills (24 pts)

Knowledge (bookkeeping) 2d (4d), Knowledge (broadcasting) 2d (4d), Knowledge (electronics) 3d (5d), Language (French) 1d (3d), Language (German) 1d (3d), Language (Russian) 1d (3d), Streetwise 2d (4d).

Superpowers (100 pts)

Utterly Forgettable 10hd (U; 5 per die; 100 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Affects Electronics +2, Always On -1, Self Only -3, Permanent +4, Subtle +1.

Effect: People simply “forget” what Grey looks like, what he did, and often that he was ever there, even if they never met him in person but only saw a recording or photograph. This happens automatically, every round, whether Grey wants it or not.

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Stalin Power Armor Mark 2 (circa 1949)

See page 240 for background details.

Western analysts consistently over-estimated the impact of the Stalin Mark 2. For example, poor intelligence indicated its flight range was measured in hundreds of miles, not just short hops.

In actuality, only the Body-boosting exoskeleton of the suit represented a significant advancement, because its power source was practically infinite. Nearly everything else on the vehicle needed refuelling/rearmament after a short period of field use.

In game terms, the Stalin Mk 2 armor is a vehicle, a bulky focus that has its own hit locations and armor.

Point Total

139 Points

Superpowers (139 pts)

Extra Tough 6hd (U; 4 per die; 48 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Focus: Chassis (Bulky, Environment-Bound, Indestructible, Manufacturable) +0, No Healing -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: The Stalin Mark 2 has six extra wound boxes on each hit location. These hit locations do not heal naturally; they must be repaired. The chassis' Indestructible Focus extra doesn't mean the Stalin Mark 2 cannot be destroyed, only that damage to the chassis does not reduce the wound boxes on other locations.

Heavy Armor 2hd (D; 8 per die; 32 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Focus: Armor Plating (Bulky, Environment-Bound, Indestructible, Manufacturable) +0, Interference +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: With HAR 2, the Stalin Mk 2 armor can shrug off small-arms fire but is vulnerable to heavy weapons (those with Penetration 2 or greater). The armor plating's Indestructible Focus extra doesn't mean the Stalin Mk 2 cannot be destroyed, only that damage to one part of the armor plating does not destroy it everywhere else.

Flight 3d+1wd (U; 1 per die; 7 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Depleted -1, Endless +3, Focus: Jets (Bulky, Environment-Bound, Manufacturable, Operational Skill [Drive Power Armor]) -3. *Capacities:* Speed.

Effect: The Stalin Mk 2 can fly at about 40 miles per hour—although with just enough fuel to carry it a quarter of a mile, this capacity looks better on paper than in practice. If targeted (called shot, hit location 1), the armor's jets have 4 wound boxes, but the suit's Heavy Armor and Extra Tough also apply.

Hyperstat (Body) 8d (3 per die; 24 pts)

Extras and Flaws: +3 Attacks quality levels, Focus: Servomotors (Bulky, Environment-Bound, Manufacturable, Operational Skill [Drive Power Armor]) -3, If/Then (replaces native Body) -1.

Effect: The armor's exoskeleton inflicts width + 3 Shock and Killing damage. The servomotors have 8 wound boxes, but the suit's Heavy Armor and Extra Tough also apply.

Size Shift 2hd (A U; 7 per die; 28 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Augment +4, Attached to Brawling -2, Focus: Chassis (Bulky, Environment-Bound, Indestructible, Manufacturable) +0, If/Then (only for Augment) -1.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Booster +2, Focus: Chassis (Environment-Bound, Indestructible, Manufacturable) +1, Increase Only -1, Limited Width -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: The Stalin Mk 2 armor stands about 25 feet (8 m.) tall and weighs slightly over 9 tons. Thanks to its mass it adds 2hd to the wearer's Body-based attacks. The chassis' Indestructible Focus extra doesn't mean the Stalin Mk 2 cannot be destroyed, only that damage to the chassis does not reduce the armor's bulk—it can certainly be melted down for scrap, but you can't reduce its height and weight by inflicting ordinary damage in combat.

Attacks

Punch or stomp, 7d+2hd (width + 3 in Shock and Killing).

Dual DShKM heavy machine guns, pilot's Coordination + Ranged Weapon (machine gun) (width + 4 in Shock and Killing, Penetration 2, Spray 4).

Defenses

HAR 2.

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Jets	10
2	Servomotors	14
3–4	Right Leg	6
5–6	Left Leg	6
7	Right Arm	6
8	Left Arm	6
9	Cargo	6
10	Cockpit	6

If the cargo or cockpit wound boxes are filled, any further damage affects the cargo or the pilot.

The Destroyer of Worlds (circa 1960)

See page 238 for background details.

Point Total

772 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (198 pts):

Body 8d+1wd (Extra: Booster +1; 72 pts)

Coordination 1d (5 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 4d (20 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d+2wd (50 pts)

Base Will 16 (30 pts)

Willpower 17 (1 pt)

Motivations: Loyalty to self (6); Passion for the evolution of humanity (10).

Skills (50 pts)

Intimidation 3d (5d+2wd), Knowledge (demolitions) 3d (7d), Knowledge (electronics) 2d (6d), Knowledge (forgery) 1d (5d), Knowledge (nuclear physics) 4d (8d), Knowledge (nuclear weapons) 3d (7d), Language (English) 2d (5d), Language (French) 2d (5d), Language (Portuguese) 1d (4d), Perception 2d (4d), Stability 2d (4d+2wd).

Superpowers (509 pts)

Control Radiation 5d (A D U; 11 per die; 55 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Booster +1. *Capacities:* Range.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Booster +1, Power Capacity (range) +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Booster +1. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: Serber can control and manipulate radiation from any source (including himself!) at a range of 1,600 yards.

Create Gamma Radiation 2hd (A U; 34 per die; 136 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Delayed Effect -2, Engulf +2, Non-Physical +2, Permanent +4, Radius (320 yards) +12, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch (plus Radius).

Useful Extras and Flaws: Permanent +4, Radius (320 yards) +12, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch (plus Radius).

Effect: Serber constantly emits deadly levels of gamma radiation. Every round, anyone within 320 yards of him takes a Non-Physical radiation attack for 2 Shock and 2 Killing to every hit location—but the damage isn't inflicted all at once. Instead the victim takes one point of Shock and one point of Killing damage per round, even after leaving Serber's proximity, until all the accumulated damage has been inflicted.

Gamma Bolt 1d+2wd (A; 14 per die; 126 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Disintegrate +2, Penetration +10. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: Serber can project a devastating blast of gamma radiation with a Penetration rating of 10. If it fills all the target's wound boxes with Killing damage—whether the target is a person's hit location or an inanimate object—it disintegrates the target utterly. Luckily for his victims, Serber's gamma bolt has a range of only 40 yards.

Invulnerability 4hd (D U; 20 per die; 160 pts)

Effects: See page 150.

Regeneration 2hd (D; 3 per die; 12 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Limited Damage (Killing) -1, Limited Width -1, Self Only -3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effects: Each round, Serber automatically recovers one point of Killing damage on every hit location.

Size Shift 2hd (U; 5 per die; 20 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Booster +1, Limited Width -1, Mass Only -1, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Mass.

Effect: Serber still has his normal, modest height and slim build, but he weighs 1,200 lbs. That reduces knockback against him by 6 yards.

Attacks

Proximity, 320 yards (2 Shock and Killing per round, inflicted at 1 Shock and Killing each round [the rest keeps accruing even after you leave the radius], Non-Physical).

Punch 8d+1wd (width in Shock and Killing; +12 yards knockback).

Gamma Bolt 1d+2wd (width in Shock and Killing, Penetration 10, Range 40 yards).

Defenses

HAR 4 (hardened); wide range of immunities; regenerates Killing damage.

IAM ('The Odd Squad,' circa 1969)

See page 234 for background details.

Point Total

500 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Alien, or possibly Human+

Stats (180 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 3d (15 pts)

Sense 3d (15 pts)

Mind 5d+2hd (45 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 4d+1wd (40 pts)

Base Will 21 (45 pts)

Willpower 21

Motivations: Loyalty to the Odd Squad 12; Passion for Invention 9.

Skills (76 pts)

Agility 2d (5d), Driving (Roswell saucer) 2d (5d), Knowledge (biology) 4d (9d+2hd), Knowledge (cryptology) 2d (7d+2hd), Knowledge (electronics) 3d (8d+2hd), Knowledge (engineering) 3d (8d+2hd), Knowledge (physics) 3d (8d+2hd), Knowledge (xenobiology) 2d (7d+2hd), Language (Chinese) 1d (6d+2hd), Language (English) 1d (6d+2hd), Language (German) 1d (6d+2hd), Language (Italian) 1d (6d+2hd), Language (Japanese) 1d (6d+2hd), Language (Russian) 1d (6d+2hd), Melee Weapon (katana) 2d (4d), Perception 3d (6d), Stability 4d (8d+1wd), Stealth 2d (5d).

Superpowers (229 pts)

Biological Duplicate 4d (A D U; 12 per die; 48 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Power Capacity (mass) +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Defends Extras and Flaws: None. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Power Capacity (mass) +2, Duration +2. *Capacities:* Mass, range.

Effect: IAM can produce a drone, physically identical to his own body, that he can control like a robot, telepathically using its senses instead of his own. Once it manifests the drone can roll its Biological Duplicate dice pool to interact with the world, attack, or avoid harm, but it's fragile; it has on each hit location only the two wound boxes from its attached Extra Tough power, below.

Attached to Biological Duplicate: Extra Tough 2hd (U; 4 per die; 16 pts)

See page 145. This applies only to IAM's biological duplicates.

Gadgeteering 7d+2hd (A D U U; 15 per die; 165 pts)

Extras, Flaws and Effect: See page 145.

Attacks

Katana 4d (width + 2 in Killing)

Defenses

None.

S.A.M. ('The Odd Squad,' circa 1969)

See page 248 for background details.

Point Total

500 Points

Archetype (12 pts)

Artificial

Stats (165 pts)

Body 10d (+3 Attacks levels; Penetration +2, Can't Harm Innocents, -1; 90 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 3d (15 pts)

Mind 4d (20 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 4d (20 pts)

Base Will None

Willpower 0

Motivations: None

Skills (62 pts)

Intimidation 6d (10d), Knowledge (Chemistry) 3d (7d), Knowledge (Electronics) 4d (8d), Knowledge (Engineering) 6d (10d), Knowledge (Metallurgy) 5d (9d), Knowledge (Physics) 4d (8d), Language (Korean) 1d (5d), Tactics 2d (6d).

Superpowers (273 pts)

Gadgeteering 3d+2hd (A D U U; 15 per die; 105 pts)

Extras, flaws and effect: See page 145. Since S.A.M. has no Base Will, someone else must donate Willpower to a project for him to be able to create gadgets.

Reinforced Armor 4hd (D U; 12 per die; 96 pts)

Defends (heavy armor) extras, flaws and effect: See the Heavy Armor miracle, page 147, but S.A.M.'s

armor has Permanent instead of Endless. S.A.M. has HAR 4.

Useful (extra tough) extras, flaws and effect: See the Extra Tough miracle, page 145. S.A.M. has four extra wound boxes on each hit location. Due to his Unhealing archetype quality, these extra wound boxes do not heal naturally. They can only be repaired with a Skill roll—a Knowledge roll such as Engineering, for example—repairing width in Shock or half that in Killing after 5—width hours of work.

Massive Robotic Construction 2hd (D U U; 15 per die; 60 pts)

Defends (light armor) extras and flaws: Armored Defense -2, Hardened Defense +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (massive size) extras and flaws: Booster +1, Growth Only -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (immunities) extras and flaws: If/Then (Variable Effect is limited to immunities) -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* None.

Effect: S.A.M. is nearly 13 feet tall and weighs over two tons; this reduces knockback that he takes by 10 yards. Due to his sheer bulk he has LAR 2 (hardened). S.A.M. does not need air, food or water, and can tolerate extremes of pressure, temperature and radiation that humans could not survive.

Attacks

Punch 10d (width + 3 in Shock and Killing with Penetration 2).

Defenses

HAR 4

LAR 2 (hardened)

+4 wound boxes on each hit location

-10 yards knockback

The Red Scare ('The Odd Squad,' circa 1969)

See page 250 for background details.

Point Total

500 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (103 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d + 3d hyperstat (22 pts)

Command 2d + 3d hyperstat (22 pts)

Base Will 16 (18 pts)

Willpower 17 (1 pt)

Motivations: Loyalty to the Odd Squad (8); Passion for Anti-Communism (8).

Skills (50 pts)

Knowledge (Chemistry) 2d (4d), Knowledge (Electronics) 2d (4d), Knowledge (Forgery) 1d, Language (Dutch) 2d, Language (French) 2d, Language (German) 2d, Language (Russian) 3d, Language (Chinese) 2d, Language (Japanese) 2d, Perception 2d (4d), Persuasion 3d (8d), Stability 2d (7d).

Superpowers (332 pts)

Telepathy 4d+2wd (A D U; 18 per die; 216 pts)

Attacks (psychosomatic shock) Extras and Flaws: Go First +2, Non-Physical +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Defends (sense threats and avoid them) Extras and Flaws: Go First +2. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (read minds) Extras and Flaws: Controlled Effect +1, Go First +2, Interference +3, Personality Displacement -3, Radius +2, Subtle +1. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: See page 156 for Telepathy's effects. The Red Scare also has Radius and Controlled Effect, so he can choose which minds to read within a 10-yard radius, and Interference, which allows him to disrupt others' actions in the same radius.

Personality Displacement is a Flaw based on "Loopy." Each time the Red Scare succeeds at using his Telepathy to read a target's mind, he must make a Stability roll. If he fails, he becomes that target mentally until the end of the current scene or situation (see Duration, page 124). During this time, he is effectively out of commission. He cannot attack, use his powers, or even share useful information; he's a babbling mess. After the Flaw wears off, he must make another Stability check. If that one also fails, he must change a number of points of one of his motivations to one of his target's motivations. The amount that changes is equal to the width of the Telepathy roll, the GM chooses which motivations are involved, and the effect is permanent.

Perceive Humans 5d (U; 2 per die; 10 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: None. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: The Red Scare can sense the presence of other human beings at a range of 160 yards.

Dead Ringer 1d+1wd (U; 6 per die; 30 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, If/Then (Variable Effect is limited to changing shapes) -1, No Physical Change -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: The Red Scare can take on the appearance of anyone he wishes. This is a telepathic effect, so it does not actually change his physical appearance or his size; a photograph would show him as he really is.

Psychic Illusions 5d+1wd (U; 8 per die; 72 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Endless +3, No Physical Change -1, No Upward Limit +2, Radius +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: The Red Scare can create long-lasting hallucinations in the minds of everyone within his power's radius. This is a psychic effect, so it does not fool cameras or artificial entities with no Base Will score. He can spend Willpower to expand the radius of this power using the No Upward Limit extra.

Slow Aging 2hd (U; 1 per die; 4 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: "Dud" power, costs 1 per die. *Capacities:* None.

Effect: The Red Scare ages very slowly. Exactly how slowly he ages is unknown, but he doesn't appear to have gained more than five years of age in the last five decades.

Attacks

Telepathy 4d+2wd (width in Shock and Killing; ignores ordinary defenses; must beat target's Stability roll; Go First 2).

Defenses

Telepathy 4d+2wd (Go First 2).

Old Glory ('The Odd Squad,' circa 1969)

See page 258 for background details.

Point Total

500 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (123 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 3d (15 pts)

Charm 4d (20 pts)

Command 5d (25 pts)

Base Will 30 (63 pts)

Willpower 32 (2 pts)

Motivations: Loyalty to the Odd Squad (15); Passion for protecting the American Way of Life (15).

Skills (38 pts)

Horsemanship 3d (5d), Knowledge (constitutional law) 5d (8d), Leadership 2d (7d), Melee Weapon (sword) 3d (5d), Persuasion 3d (7d), Ranged Weapon (flintlock pistol) 4d (6d).

Superpowers (292 pts)

Lucky Strike 10wd (A; 2 per die; 80 pts)

Attacks extras and flaws: Augment +4, If/Then (does not affect initiative) -1, If/Then (only for Augment) -1, If/Then (requires a success) -1, Willpower Bid (-1).

Effect: Old Glory can add up to 10wd to any attack dice pool, but the extra dice apply only if he rolls a successful attack. He must declare that he intends to use Lucky Strike before rolling the attack; if the attack fails, he cannot add any dice and he loses a point of Willpower. When the extra dice expand a set they do not affect initiative; Old Glory uses his rolled width to determine who goes first.

Lucky Break 3d+1wd (A D U; 24 per die; 168 pts)

Attacks extras and flaws: Augment +4, If/Then (only for Augment) -1, Willpower Cost -2.

Defends extras and flaws: Controlled Effect +1, Interference +3, Permanent +4, Radius +2. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful extras and flaws: Augment +4, Controlled Effect +1, Radius +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Effects: Old Glory can add his dice to any of his own actions and those of any other characters he designates in a 10-yard (10-meter) radius, and his power can activate to make bizarrely unlikely things occur; or he can remove dice from enemies' attacks against him and designated characters in the radius; or by spending Willpower he can add his Lucky Break dice to one of his own attacks.

Bypass Obstacles 2hd (U; 2 per die; 8 pts)

Useful extras and flaws: If/Then (not when observed) -1, Subtle +1.

Effects: Old Glory can simply ignore walls, doors, gates or other barriers, as long as nobody is watching. If he's observed, even if he doesn't know about the observation, the power fails. Exactly how this works is a mystery to everyone except Old Glory.

Regeneration 2hd (U U; 9 per die; 36 pts)

Useful (healing) extras and flaws: Engulf +2, Limited Damage (Killing) -1, Limited Width -1, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* None.

Useful (immunity) extras and flaws: Permanent +4, If/Then (only for immunities) -1, Self Only -3, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effects: Each round, Old Glory automatically recovers one point of Killing damage on every hit location. The power's second Useful quality makes him immune to most poisons, diseases, old age, and other sources of physical debilitation.

Attacks

Punch 2d (width in Shock).

Flintlock pistol 6d (width + 1 in Shock and Killing; *reload time:* 7—width rounds with a skill roll).

Saber 5d (width + 1 in Killing).

—**Any attack with Lucky Break:** Up to +3d+1wd.

—**Any attack with Lucky Strike:** Up to +10wd with a successful attack roll.

Defenses

Lucky Break 3d+1wd.

AEGIS Combat System (circa 1971)

U.S. Army troops occupying the Lebanon partition in 1971 were armed with devastating weaponry, created in part by Talents and mass-produced after a tremendous infusion of Talent Willpower.

The M-23 Infantry Combat Weapon (ICW)

A magnetic accelerator with the following settings:

- 1/3/300 rounds a second selective firing
- Subsonic setting
- 200/600 round magazines
- Integrated sight which is connected to IRIS

A backpack AEGIS missile launcher including:

- 2 anti-infantry Nuclear Isomer warheads (yield, roughly .001 kilotons)
- 2 anti-vehicle/armor Nuclear Isomer warheads
- 1 “building-buster” Nuclear Isomer warhead

The IRIS (Integral Reactive Infantry System)

An integrated body armor, communications, medical and image-enhancement system. This system includes live medical information, global positioning, integrated “smart” communications system, remote drug administration, IR/UV goggles, battlefield HUD and nano-carbon fiber plates covering all major areas of the body.

Point Total

323 Points

Superpowers (323 pts)

IRIS Remote Data and Drug Administration
1d+1wd (U U; 2 per die; 10 pts)

Useful (drug administration) Extras and Flaws: Remote Use (can be triggered by a user connected to the system remotely) +3, Engulf +2; Depleted (4 charges) -1, Focus (Accessible, Manufacturable) -1, Limited Damage (Shock) -1, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (data administration) Extras and Flaws: Booster +3, Focus (Accessible, Manufacturable) -1, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: The remote drug administration system allows the wearer to recuperate width in Shock on each hit location. The IRIS suit communicates medical information and global positioning data to the wearer’s command center up to 10 kilometers away, and allows voice communications and a heads-up visual display.

IRIS Image Enhancement System 5d (U; 1 per die; 5 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Focus (Accessible, Manufacturable) -1. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: When using the IR/UV function the IRIS wearer sees in the infrared and ultraviolet spectra. When seeing in those spectra the wearer uses this power’s dice pool for Sense checks instead of the usual Sense + skill roll.

IRIS Nano-Carbon Fiber Plating 2hd (D+2; 8 per die; 16 pts)

Defends (hardened LAR) Extras and Flaws: Endless +3, Focus (Manufacturable) +0/0/0, Hardened Defense +2; Armored Defense -2, Incomplete Coverage -1. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: The wearer has hardened LAR 4. The Incomplete Coverage flaw reflects the fact that body armor is not seamless: Any attack that hits with width 3 or greater hits the wearer in an unarmored spot and the LAR does not apply.

AEGIS Missile Launcher 10d (25 per die; 250 pts)

Attacks (nuclear isomer warheads) Extras and Flaws: Area +18 (4 Shock to each hit location, plus 9d+2hd in Area dice, to all targets within 80 yards), Engulf +2, Penetration +3, Radius +2, Variable Effect +4; Depleted (only 5 warheads total) -3, Focus (Accessible, Manufacturable, Operational Skill) -2, Fragile -1, Full Power Only -1, Go Last -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is limited to three types of warheads with specific combinations of Extras and Flaws, which must be designated upon deployment and cannot be changed out in the field) -2, Obvious -1, Slow -1.

Effects: Firing a warhead uses the shooter's AEGIS Skill dice pool. It fires last in a combat round, regardless of the attack roll's width, and requires a combat round to reload before it can be fired again.

The "standard" Attacks quality package listed above is for the anti-infantry warhead. The blast does width + 8 in Shock and Killing damage, with Penetration 3, to every hit location of every character and object within 20 yards of the target. The concussion blast and shrapnel do a further 4 Shock to every hit location, plus 8d+1hd in Area dice, to every character and object within 80 yards of the target.

The AEGIS has two alternative warheads: An anti-armor warhead (the standard AEGIS kit includes two) and a "bunker buster" warhead (the standard kit includes one).

The anti-armor warhead has Attacks +10, Penetration +5, and Area +14 (4 Shock to each location, plus 6d+2hd in Area dice, with a 40-yard radius).

The bunker-buster warhead has Attacks +12, Penetration +7, and Area +10 (4 Shock to each location, plus 3d+2hd in Area dice, with a 20-yard radius).

The power uses the Variable Effects Extra to allow for changing the effects between warheads. The user must specify which assortment of five warheads he or she is equipped with before going into the field.

M-23 Infantry Combat Weapon (42 pts)

See page 139 for the M-23 Infantry Combat Weapon's game statistics.

Yaum Al-Qiyâmah ('Day of Judgment') (circa 1994)

The terrorist who destroyed the Eiffel Tower killed hundreds of people in the process, including six Talents. In addition to these superpowers, Yaum Al-Qiyâmah had a tremendous Base Will score with which to fuel his strength.

Point Total

676 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (139 pts)

Body 4d + 6d hyperstat (see below) (20 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 3d (15 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 1d (5 pts)

Command 4d (20 pts)

Base Will 24 (57 pts)

Willpower 26 (2 pts)

Motivations: Loyalty to Al Jihad, Baqaya Jihan-nam (10); Passion for the destruction of unbelievers (14).

Skills (36 pts)

Brawling 1d (11d), Intimidation 2d (6d), Language (English) 1d (3d), Language (French) 3d (5d), Lie 3d (4d), Melee Weapon (knife) 1d (11d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 1d (3d), Stability 4d (8d), Streetwise 2d (4d).

Superpowers (486 pts)

Hyperstat (Body) +6d (18 per die; 108 pts)

Hyperstat Extras and Flaws: Attacks +5, Booster +3, No Upward Limit +2, Obvious -1, Penetration +5.

Effect: Yaum Al-Qiyâmah can lift staggering amounts of weight, and he can spend Willpower

to increase the width of his Body rolls and the amount he can lift. His hands glow with a bright light when he exerts his amazing strength.

Native Body Stat Modifiers (+14 per die; 56 pts)

Extras and Flaws: Attacks +5, Booster +3, No Upward Limit +2, Obvious -1, Penetration +5.

Effect: All of Yaum Al-Qiyâmah's hyperstat extras and power qualities apply to his normal Body dice.

Heavy Armor 5hd (D; 9 per die; 90 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Interference +3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effects: Yaum Al-Qiyâmah has 5 HAR (hardened).

Invulnerability 4hd (D U; 20 per die; 160 pts)

Effects: See page 150.

Light Armor 4hd (D; 6 per die; 48 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Hardened Defense +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Yaum Al-Qiyâmah has LAR 4 (hardened).

Regeneration 2hd (U; 6 per die; 24 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Obvious -1, No Upward Limit +2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Each round, Yaum Al-Qiyâmah recovers two Shock and two Killing damage on each hit location. His wounds glow with a bright light while he heals. He can spend Willpower to increase the healing.

Attacks

Brawling 10d (width + 5 in Shock and Killing, Penetration 5).

Defenses

HAR 5 (hardened); LAR 4 (hardened); Invulnerability.

Fish Invader (circa 2005)

The “invader” was the most common type of creature seen on human vessels in the Fish war. It uses tendrils to hold weapons or tools; as long as any two are functional it suffers no penalties for losing them.

Point Total

200 Points

Archetype (0 pts)

Alien (with No Willpower)

Stats (70 pts)

Body 3d+1wd (35 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 1d (5 pts)

Charm 1d (5 pts)

Command 1d (5 pts)

Base Will 2

Skills (26 pts)

Athletics 2d (5d+1wd), Brawling 2d (5d+1wd), Endurance 2d (5d+1wd), Perception 3d (5d), Ranged Weapon (Subversion Gun) 2d (4d), Stealth 2d (4d).

Superpowers (104 pts)

Alien Resilience 2hd (D U; 12 per die; 48 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Hardened Defense +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (alien metabolism) Extras and Flaws: Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (Extra Tough) Extras and Flaws: Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: The Fish invader has LAR 2 (hardened) with two extra wound boxes on each hit location. It can survive indefinitely in a wide array of atmospheres.

Custom Hit Locations 2hd (U; 2 per die; 8 pts)

See page 143.

Subversion Gun 4d (A+1 U; 12 per die; 48 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Focus (Accessible, Delicate, Manufacturable, Operational Skill [Subversion Gun]) -2, Penetration +2. *Capacities:* Range.

Useful (mind control) Extras and Flaws: Always On (even if the invader dies and the gun is touched without firing it) +4, Automatic -1, Delayed Effect -2, Focus (Accessible, Delicate, Manufacturable, Operational Skill [Subversion Gun]) -2, If/Then (the gun must touch or shoot the target) -1, Permanent +4, Infection +4, Subtle +1. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: As a weapon the subversion gun is nothing noteworthy, not much better than a modern human rifle: width + 1 in Shock and Killing damage with Penetration 2 and relatively short range. Its true danger is in its subversion power: If it harms a target, or if a living creature even touches the gun, the mind control power is triggered—and the “Infection” Extra causes it to continue to be triggered every single round, even after the target is under control. If a Talent throws off the effect with Base Will, the next round the power applies again, and the round after that, and so on, until the victim is cured by some enormously difficult (i.e., Talent-powered) feat of genetic reverse-engineering. Once the power takes hold, the target becomes a willing ally to the Fish and a cooperative member of their alien society. The Fish do not seem to consider this a violation.

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Leg	6
2	Right Leg	6
3	Tendrils	5
4	Tendrils	5
5	Tendrils	5
6	Tendrils	5
7–9	Body	10
10	Head	8

Private First Class Wilkins Unruh, JSC Defense Corps, U.S.S. *Nereid* (circa 2005)

Stuck with what appeared to be a dud Talent—altering dice throws isn't worth much when every casino has Talent sensors on staff—Unruh was a typical Defense Corps soldier aboard *Nereid*. He trained when he had to, served on security details, kept his head down and counted out the days until the war might end and he could go home. The power he displayed in the battle that destroyed *Poseidon* was as surprising to Unruh as it was to everyone else.

Point Total

200 Points

Archetype (15 pts)

Human+

Stats (99 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 14 (27 pts)

Willpower 16 (2 pts)

Motivations: Loyalty to Earth (3); Loyalty to the Corps (8); Passion for music (3).

Skills (40 pts)

Athletics 2d (5d), Brawling 2d (5d), Endurance 2d (5d), Empathy 2d (4d), Intimidation 2d (5d), Perception 2d (4d), Ranged Weapon (grenade) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (machine gun) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (rifle) 2d (4d), Stability 3d (6d), Tactics 1d (3d).

Superpowers (56 pts)

Quantum Certainty 6d+4hd (D U U; 4 per die; 56 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Interference +2, If/Then (only when death appears imminent) -1, Uncontrollable -2. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (alter dice) Extras and Flaws: Dud power; costs 1 Point per die. *Capacities:* Range.

Useful (alter fate) Extras and Flaws: Booster +3, Exhausted -3, If/Then (only when death appears imminent) -1, Interference +2, Loopy -1, Mental Strain -2, No Upward Limit +2, Radius +2, Uncontrollable -2. *Capacities:* Range (radius, no upward limit).

Effect: Unruh's power is mostly beyond his conscious control. He can alter the throw of dice whenever and however he likes, but beyond that his power kicks in only when he's absolutely convinced that he's about to die. Then it does two things. Its *Defends* quality gobbles dice from attack rolls, making it hard to actually kill Unruh after all. Its "alter fate" quality does—other things. It changes the outcome of a situation. Exactly how or why is beyond Unruh's comprehension. It has a reach of a thousand miles and affects everything in at least a 10-yard radius, but with No Upward Limit Unruh can spend Willpower to increase its radius, doubling the radius for every eight Willpower he spends or doubling the range for every one Willpower. When the Fish attempted to land on *Nereid*, Unruh's power altered the fate of every Fish invader within a mile, causing them to appear in the wrong places. This cost a staggering 72 Willpower—but with the fate of his beloved Defense Corps at stake he was able to burn eight points of Base Will to fuel it. By doing so, Unruh saved his ship and possibly humanity itself.

Henry 'Wraith' Francis (circa 2010)

Name: Patrol Officer Henry Francis, NYPD Talent Squad

Nationality: American

Race: African American

DOB: June 3, 1977 **DOD:** —

Height: 5'9" **Weight:** 160 lbs

Appearance: Nothing much about Officer Francis stands out apart from the "T" symbol of the Talent Squad emblazoned on his uniform. He's average in height and build, with short hair and no distinguishing marks. He smiles often and talks all the time.

Known Superhuman Abilities: Francis can make himself completely insubstantial, which allows him to pass through walls and other barriers as easily as fog. He can carry others with him in this state, and while insubstantial he can fly. He can even turn invisible in his "wraith" form, and can turn others invisible if he touches them—but, somewhat awkwardly, he can't turn invisible any inanimate objects, including clothes.

History: Henry Francis' Talent power manifested when he was a teenager. It wasn't anything gradual; one day in football tryouts he was about to be clobbered by a defensive lineman, and he simply went totally insubstantial. The other player passed right through him and Francis, trying to leap aside, flew into the air. His power earned him some minor fame, but nothing lucrative; the only job offers that came in were from shady customers indeed, and he wasn't interested in becoming a spy or a thief. After high school he put in an application with the police department, because he'd heard the pay on the Talent Squad was pretty good and he figured it would be honest work. For the most part, it has been. Francis hasn't yet run into serious corruption on the force. He has no idea how he'll react if he does.

Point Total

250 Points

Archetype (5 pts)

Mutant

Stats (91 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 3d (15 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 3d (15 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 11 (15 pts)

Willpower 12 (1 pt)

Motivations: Loyalty to New York City (5); Passion for protecting the innocent (6).

Skills (64 pts)

Athletics 1d (3d), Brawling 2d (4d), Dodge 2d (4d), Driving (squad car) 2d (4d), Empathy 1d (4d), Endurance 1d (3d), First Aid 1d (3d), Interrogation 1d (4d), Intimidation 1d (4d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Leadership 1d (4d), Lie 1d (4d), Melee Weapon (club) 2d (4d), Perception 1d (4d), Performance (singing) 1d (4d), Persuasion 2d (5d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (4d), Scrutiny 2d (5d), Stability 2d (5d), Stealth 2d (4d), Streetwise 2d (4d).

Powers (90 pts)

Wraith Form 6d+1wd (A D U U U; 9 per die; 90 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Horrifying -1, Non-Physical +2, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch.

Defends Extras and Flaws: None. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (insubstantiality; see page 149) Extras and Flaws: Duration +2. *Capacities:* Mass.

Useful (flight) Extras and Flaws: Attached to Insubstantiality -2, Booster +1. *Capacities:* Speed.

Useful (invisibility; see page 149) Extras and Flaws: Attached to Insubstantiality -2, Duration +2, If/Then (only living things) -1. *Capacities:* Mass.

Effect: Wraith can turn insubstantial, and when insubstantial he can fly and even make himself invisible by letting light pass through his body. Unfortunately he doesn't have as fine control over the invisibility as the rest of his powers; he can turn clothing or even other people that he touches insubstantial, but can only turn his own body invisible (or other living matter, but not anything a passenger is wearing or carrying). He can use his power to attack by "phasing" into the space occupied by a target, which can be dodged normally but ignores armor. He can use it to defend by simply phasing in time for an attack to pass harmlessly through him.

Attacks

Insubstantiality 6d+1wd (width in Shock and Killing; ignores armor).

Police baton 4d (width + 1 in Shock).

Talent Squad service pistol 4d (Adapted, Manufactured Focus with explosive, armor-piercing ammunition: width + 3 in Shock and Killing; Penetration 1; 16 shots with four spare magazines; range 20 yards).

Talent Squad "NullCuffs™" (Adapted, Manufactured Focus: Nullify 2hd with Variable Effect [If/Then: applies to any Source]; no range; target must be pinned first; handcuffs can be broken by un-Nullified Body Stat of 6d or more).

Defenses

Bulletproof vest (HAR 1 + LAR 2 on the torso).

Tactical helmet, usually in squad car (HAR 1 on the head).

'Rabid' Anne Gareth (circa 2010)

Name: Patrol Officer Anne Gareth, NYPD Talent Squad

Nationality: American

Race: Caucasian

DOB: October 12, 1972 **DOD:** —

Height: 5'5"

Weight: 125 lbs

Appearance: Anne Gareth is a plain-looking, no-nonsense woman in her 30s. On the job she wears powered armor of her own construction, angular, thick and airtight, with a face-shield that can go opaque or transparent.

Known Superhuman Abilities: Gareth has a superhuman knack for creating incredible technology. It's entirely intuitive. Sometimes she locks herself away in her workshop, goes into a sort of fugue of perfect concentration and inspiration, and produces things utterly beyond ordinary science. Since she's also a cop, most of her inventions tend to be oriented toward tactics and survival.

History: "Rabid" Anne Gareth earned her nickname in her first days on the force, when she proved uncommonly cool-headed under fire and reliable in a crisis. She hates the nickname, but loves the police. Gareth joined soon after high school—her father was a retired detective—and worked as a patrol officer for four undistinguished years before her Talent power manifested. She has no memory of its first appearance; one weekend she simply blanked out, and when she came around she had turned her dad's basement into a workshop loaded with impossible gadgets. When she showed up for work with the first version of her armor, they moved her to the Talent Squad on the spot.

Point Total

250 Points

Archetype (20 pts)

Anachronist

Stats (72 pts)

Body 2d (5d with armor) (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 4d (20 pts)

Base Will 6

Willpower 8

Motivations: Loyalty to the NYPD (3); Passion for seeing her inventions succeed (3).

Skills (40 pts)

Athletics 1d (6d), Brawling 1d (6d), Dodge 1d (3d), Driving (squad car) 2d (4d), Endurance 1d (6d), First Aid 1d (3d), Interrogation 1d (5d), Intimidation 1d (5d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Melee Weapon (club) 1d (6d), Perception 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (grenade) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 1d (3d), Scrutiny 1d (3d), Stability 3d (7d), Streetwise 1d (3d).

Powers (118 pts)

Life Support System (Immunity) 2hd (U; 5 per die; 20 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Focus -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for immunities) -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, Variable Effect +4.

Capacities: N/A.

Effect: Gareth's armor includes a host of protective and life-support systems: oxygen, sound dampening, and flare resistance are just a few of its capabilities.

Medical Paste Dispenser (Healing) 2hd (U+1; 1 per die; 4 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Engulf +2, Focus -1, If/Then (one use per injury) -1, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch.

Effect: Gareth has no idea what's actually in the "paste" that her suit dispenses, a gummy, slightly metallic substance that has astonishing palliative properties. She suspects it's some kind of nanorobotics compound, but she doesn't say that out loud because it would freak her fellow officers right the hell out.

Multi-Spectrum Adaptive Sensors (Perceive) 1d+1wd (U; 3 per die; 15 pts)

Useful Extras and Flaws: Focus -1, If/Then (only for Variable Effect) -1, If/Then (Variable Effect is only for sensors) -1, Variable Effect +4. *Capacities:* N/A.

Effect: Gareth's helmet includes an array of sensors: light enhancement, telescopic zooming, infrared, ultraviolet, thermal sight, sound enhancement, gas analysis, and so on. By examining metabolic processes they can even tell when someone is lying. (The lie-detector function is a contest with the other character's Lie Skill.)

Multibeamer 5d (A+3 A+2; 4 per die; 20 pts)

Attacks + 3 (stunner) Extras and Flaws: Accessible Focus -2, If/Then (same focus as laser) -1, Limited Damage (Shock only) -1. *Capacities:* Range.

Attacks + 2 (laser) Extras and Flaws: Accessible Focus -2, If/Then (same focus as stunner) -1, Limited Damage (Killing only) -1, Penetration +3. *Capacities:* Range.

Effect: Gareth's multibeamer, attached to her armor's right arm, can switch between a stun setting (an electrical current carried along a plasma beam) and a laser beam.

Powered Exoskeleton (Hyperstat [Body]) +3d (3 per die; 9 pts)

Extras and Flaws: Focus -1.

Effect: Gareth's armor's powered exoskeleton gives her +3d Body.

Reactive Camouflage 1d+1wd (D U+1; 2 per die; 10 pts)

Defends Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Focus -1, Slow -2. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful Extras and Flaws: Duration +2, Focus -1, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Gareth's camouflage system adjusts reflected light to match its surroundings, making her nearly invisible to normal sight. True invisibility takes a full round to achieve.

Reinforced Armor Paneling 4hd (D D; 5 per die; 40 pts)

Defends (HAR) Extras and Flaws: Always On -1, Armored Defense -2, Unwieldy Focus -3, Interference +3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Defends (LAR) Extras and Flaws: Always On -1, Armored Defense -2, Unwieldy Focus -3, Hardened Defense +2, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Gareth's armor paneling and reinforced substructure gives her HAR 4 and LAR 4 (hardened). It restricts all physical actions to width 2 for initiative purposes only.

Attacks

Police baton 6d (width + 1 in Shock).

Stun beam 5d (width + 3 in Shock; range 160 yards).

Laser beam 5d (width + 2 in Killing, Penetration 3; range 160 yards).

Talent Squad "NullCuffs™" (Adapted, Manufactured Focus: Nullify 2hd with Variable Effect [If/Then: applies to any Source]; no range; target must be pinned first; handcuffs can be broken by un-Nullified Body Stat of 6d or more).

Defenses

HAR 4; LAR 4 (hardened); Invisibility 1d+1wd (slow); life support system

Dr. Jurassic (circa 2010)

Name: Daniel James Tunbridge, Ph.D.

Nationality: British

Race: Caucasian

DOB: March 22, 1969

DOD: —

Height: 5'9" (or 29'9")

Weight: 171 lbs (or 10.6 tons)

Appearance: Dr. Tunbridge is a normal-looking paleontologist, with short brown hair in a bad haircut. He is the last person in the world you would think could transform into a thirty-foot-tall Tyrannosaurus Rex with all the terrifying trimmings.

Known Superhuman Abilities: In his T-Rex form Dr Jurassic's roar is stunningly loud, his sense of smell is so acute he can track "prey" for miles, and his jaws can smash through thick armor armor. As T-Rex he retains his intelligence and can even speak, although he can't form "P", "F" and "B" sounds with his huge, lipless palate.

History: Dr. Daniel Tunbridge is a world-renowned paleontologist. In the 1990s he served as an advisor on a very successful series of Hollywood dinosaur movies and has starred on cable programs about dinosaurs. He was preparing to shoot a series on the BBC when he came to the attention of the Sons of Eden, fundamentalists who aggressively promoted creationism. They abducted Tunbridge, planning to tape his testimony exposing the "evolutionary conspiracy" as a Satanic plot.

Police found Tunbridge naked in the ruins of a small house, surrounded by the half-eaten bodies of his kidnappers. Tunbridge could not remember what had happened. A suspicious medical examiner determined that Dr. Tunbridge had not in fact eaten the kidnappers. No charges were pressed, but gradually Tunbridge discovered he could transform himself into a T-Rex at will.

Tunbridge has since become a household name. He is exceptionally popular in Japan, where his T-

Rex face adorns shoes, billboards and breakfast cereals. He donates the proceeds anonymously to the Society for Paleontology and Archaeology.

Point Total

250 Points

Archetype (5 pts)

Mutant

Stats (99 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 5d (25 pts)

Charm 3d (15 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 11 (12 pts)

Willpower 13 (2 pts)

Motivations: Loyalty to victims of Talent wrongdoing (5); Passion for paleontology (5).

Skills (40 pts)

Brawling 2d (4d), Dodge 2d (4d), Knowledge (computers) 2d (7d), Knowledge (paleontology) 5d (10d), Perception 2d (5d), Persuasion 4d (7d), Research 3d (8d).

Powers (106 pts)

T-Rex Form 2hd (U U U U U D; 11 per die; 44 pts)

Useful (change form) Extras and Flaws: Endless +3, Obvious -1, Self Only -3.

Useful (damage does not transfer) Extras and Flaws: Attached to “change form” quality -2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (Size Shift) Extras and Flaws: Attached to “change form” -2, Booster +2, Full Power Only -1, If/Then (up only) -1. Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (Extra Tough) Extras and Flaws: Always On -1, Attached to “change form” -2, Engulf +2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3. *Capacities:* Self.

Useful (Custom Hit Locations) Extras and Flaws: Attached to “change form” -2, Permanent +4, Self Only -3.

Defends Extras and Flaws: Armored Defense -2, Attached to T-Rex Form -2, Interference +3, Permanent +4. *Capacities:* Self.

Effect: Tunbridge can transform into a Tyrannosaurus Rex. In T-Rex form he has two more wound boxes on each hit location, and his hit locations change. Damage he takes in T-Rex form disappears when he reverts to human (and vice versa), but if he returns to the other form the damage remains until he heals. In T-Rex form he has HAR 2.

T-Rex Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1–2	Left Leg	8
3–4	Right Leg	8
5	Left Arm	5
6	Right Arm	5
7–8	Torso	12
9–10	Head	8

Hyperstat (Body) +7d (4 per die; 28 pts)

Extras and Flaws: Attached to T-Rex Form -2, Attacks quality +2.

Effect: In T-Rex form, Dr. Jurassic has +7d Body and his hand-to-hand attacks inflict width + 2 in Shock and Killing damage.

Enhanced Body Stat 2d (+1 per die; 2 pts)

Extras and Flaws: If/Then (enhanced only in T-Rex Form) -1, Attacks quality +2.

Effect: In T-Rex form, Dr. Jurassic’s original Body Stat dice also do greater damage.

Hyperstat (Sense) +1wd (1 per die; 4 pts)

Extras and Flaws: Attached to T-Rex Form -2, Booster (range) +1, If/Then (smell only) -2.

Effect: In T-Rex form, Dr. Jurassic's sense of smell is far more acute than a human's, and he can pick up scents ten times farther away. (He must prepare a round for a bonus die to roll with his Wiggle Die, since his normal Sense Stat does not have Booster.)

Stomp or Chomp 2hd (A+4; 6 per die; 24 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Attached to T-Rex Form -2, Engulf +2, If/Then (only on a target smaller than him) -1, Penetration +3, Slow -2. *Capacities:* Mass.

Effect: Dr. Jurassic can stomp a human-sized enemy into the ground or bite with his enormous teeth, inflicting damage to every hit location at once.

Roar 2hd (A; 1 per die; 4 pts)

Attacks Extras and Flaws: Attached to T-Rex Form -2, Controlled Effect +1, Limited Damage (Shock only) -1, Non-Physical +2, Obvious -1, Radius +2, Touch Only -2. *Capacities:* Touch (10-yard radius).

Effect: Dr. Jurassic's roar inflicts 2 Shock to hit location 10 of everything within 10 yards. It ignores ordinary defenses, but anything that blocks sound waves stops it altogether.

Attacks

Bash 10d (width + 2 in Shock and Killing)

Stomp or chomp 2hd (width + 4 in Shock and Killing, Penetration 3, Engulf)

Roar (width + 2 in Shock, hit location 10, 10-yard radius)

Defenses

HAR 2

The Enforcer (circa 2010)

Name: Andrew Stephen Pinelli

Nationality: American

Race: Caucasian

DOB: April 2, 1968

DOD: —

Height: 6'4"

Weight: 260 lbs

Appearance: The Enforcer is strong as a linebacker but has the lithe agility of a gymnast. He has a flat nose, suspicious eyes, and close-cropped graying black hair. On patrol he wears a dark coat and a black mask.

Known Superhuman Abilities: None. The Enforcer has the kind of luck, for lack of a better word (in the game we call it Willpower), that you find only in Talents, but otherwise all he has is an obsessive dedication to the martial arts—karate, jiu-jitsu, ninjitsu, aikido, you name it, he's mastered it. He constantly studies Talents' strengths and defenses, and prides himself on the fact that he can take them on and win. He loves to talk about it. Especially with Talents.

History: When Andrew Pinelli was four months old his parents took him and his twin sister to Chicago for the historic 1968 Democratic National Convention. The Pinellis were part of the burgeoning peace movement, and they believed that Talents, whose powers showed the growing potential of humanity, would become its spokesmen, champions for justice and reason in the modern day just as they had been champions for freedom and democracy in the war. None of the Pinelli family had any such powers themselves, but they had an abundance of faith.

Andrew Pinelli's mother and sister died in a collapsing building as the Odd Squad, those bizarre government-sanctioned Talents turned peace protesters, battled the Army's Talent Team One.

Pinelli's father, Stephen, won a fortune in lawsuits against Chicago, the Democratic Party, and the federal government. Many other victims of the violence did, too, but Stephen Pinelli and his

baby son, bereft of mother and sister, were the ones whose photos made front pages everywhere.

By the time Andrew Pinelli was four, his mission in life was set. His father became a recluse, and hired a succession of trainers and tutors to teach his son far from the public eye. Andrew, his father explained to the boy, had a mission. It was a unique mission, and he was the only one who could accomplish it, because he was the only one who saw how crucial it was. Andrew Pinelli trained to protect humanity from Talent threats. The fact that Andrew was no Talent himself made the mission all the more important, even noble.

Andrew's education was one-sided. He received, in fact, a bare minimum of conventional schooling. He learned to read and write well enough, and went through the basics of mathematics and history, but the bulk of every day went to physical training and mental conditioning: Running, sports, gymnastics, hunting; he would have been a shoo-in for any Olympic team. But that was not his calling.

Andrew Pinelli went on his first mission at age twenty, taking on the New York-based Talent enforcers of a South American drug cartel, hard men and women who excelled in making witnesses disappear without a trace. They found themselves disappearing, instead, one at a time, and Andrew demolished three of them along with a dozen non-Talent gunmen in a running battle at a New Jersey dock. Pinelli, shot three times, barely escaped ahead of an army of police.

Within a year, the New York press nicknamed the mysterious vigilante, an apparently normal man who took on Talent criminals, the Enforcer.

Pinelli has now waged his crusade for nearly twenty years. To say it has left him warped is an understatement, with the shallowest of social contacts and only his father and a handful of close-knit allies for support. Sometimes he seems to thrive on it. It is his responsibility, after all, to prove humanity's capacity to stand up for itself. The normal men and

women of the world are his charges, his adopted brothers, sisters, and children, and their defense is his responsibility—whether they realize it, or want it, or not.

Point Total

250 Points

Archetype (5 pts)

Super-Normal

Stats (133 pts)

Body 5d (25 pts)

Coordination 5d (25 pts)

Sense 4d (20 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 5d (25 pts)

Base Will 13 (18 pts)

Willpower 13

Motivations: Loyalty to his “charges” (6); Passion for overcoming enemy Talents (7).

Skills (112 pts)

Athletics 5d (10d), Brawling 5d (10d), Dodge 5d (10d), Endurance 5d (10d), First Aid 2d (4d), Intimidation 3d (8d), Lie 2d (4d), Melee Weapon (club) 5d (10d), Perception 3d (7d), Ranged Weapon (electrolaser) 3d (8d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (7d), Security Systems 3d (5d), Stability 2d (7d), Stealth 5d (10d), Streetwise 3d (5d), Tactics 3d (5d).

Attacks

Expandable baton 10d (width + 1 in Shock).

Off-the-shelf electrolaser pistol 8d (Adapted, Manufactured Focus: width in Shock, daze, electrocuting, ignores armor, stopped by insulation).

Defenses

Bulletproof vest (HAR 1 and LAR 2 on hit locations 7–9).

Civilians and Soldiers

These sample characters are easy to drop into your game. Just change out a Stat die or Skill die here and there to customize them. For the sake of space these templates focus on modern urban characters, the kind most likely to show up in a superhero game.

Blue-Collar Worker (72 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 4

Skills (12 pts): Athletics 1d (3d), Brawling 1d (3d), Endurance 2d (4d), Knowledge (mechanics) 2d (4d).

Hardened Criminal (80 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 1d (5 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 4

Skills (20 pts): Brawling 1d (4d), Intimidation 2d (4d), Lie 2d (4d), Melee Weapon (knife) 1d (4d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 1d (3d), Stability 1d (3d), Streetwise 2d (3d).

Performer (79 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 3d (15 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (14 pts): Empathy 2d (4d), Perception 2d (4d), Performance (one type) 2d (5d), Persuasion 1d (4d).

White-Collar Worker (80 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 4

Skills (20 pts): Driving (car) 1d (3d), four Mind Skills at 2d (4d), Scrutiny 1d (3d).

Federal Agent (125 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (60 pts): Athletics 2d (4d), Brawling 2d (4d), Empathy 3d (5d), Driving (car) 2d (4d), Interrogation 1d (4d), Intimidation 2d (5d), Knowledge (any one) 2d (4d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Leadership 2d (5d), Lie 2d (4d), Navigation 1d (3d), Perception 3d (5d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (4d), Scrutiny 3d (5d), Stability 1d (4d).

Police Detective (120 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (50 pts): Athletics 1d (4d), Brawling 2d (5d), Driving (car) 2d (4d), Empathy 2d (4d), Interrogation 2d (4d), Intimidation 2d (5d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Lie 3d (5d), Perception 2d (4d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (4d), Scrutiny 2d (4d), Stability 1d (4d), Streetwise 2d (4d).

Police SWAT Team Member (125 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 3d (15 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (50 pts): Athletics 3d (6d), Brawling 3d (6d), Driving (car) 2d (4d), Intimidation 3d (6d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Lie 2d (4d), Ranged Weapon (grenade) 2d (5d), Ranged Weapon (rifle) 3d (6d), Stability 3d (6d), Stealth 1d (4d), Streetwise 1d (3d).

Police Patrol Officer (110 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (40 pts): Athletics 1d (4d), Brawling 2d (5d), Driving (car) 2d (4d), Intimidation 2d (5d), Knowledge (criminal procedure) 2d (4d), Lie 2d (4d), Melee Weapon (club) 2d (5d), Perception 2d (4d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (4d), Stability 1d (4d), Streetwise 2d (4d).

Military Officer (115 pts)

Body 2d (10 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 3d (15 pts)

Base Will 5

Skills (50 pts): Athletics 2d (4d), Brawling 2d (4d), Endurance 2d (4d), Intimidation 2d (5d), Knowledge (any one) 2d (4d), Leadership 1d (4d), Perception 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (grenade) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (pistol) 2d (4d), Stability 2d (5d), Tactics 2d (4d).

Soldier (95 pts)

Body 3d (15 pts)

Coordination 2d (10 pts)

Sense 2d (10 pts)

Mind 2d (10 pts)

Charm 2d (10 pts)

Command 2d (10 pts)

Base Will 4

Skills (30 pts): Athletics 2d (5d), Brawling 2d (5d), Endurance 2d (5d), Intimidation 2d (4d), Perception 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (grenade) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (machine gun) 1d (3d), Ranged Weapon (rifle) 2d (4d), Stability 1d (3d), Tactics 1d (3d).

Animals

Most animals lack the Mind, Charm and Command Stats, and in some cases they lack Body, but they can use Skills based on those missing Stats by rolling the Skill dice. Missing Stats indicate that the animal's natural attributes are not comparable to a human.

Animals should have whatever natural abilities are appropriate, such as the ability to recognize scents, flight, breathing water and so on. It's easy to build these abilities as powers; just remember that no amount of Nullify will keep a horse from galloping.

Most animal attacks inflict Shock damage. Those with no listed Body inflict width—1 in Shock. Large animals like bears and huge cats inflict Killing damage with their fangs and claws. Huge animals may inflict width (or more) in Shock and Killing.

Avian, Raptor

Includes birds of prey such as eagles, falcons, hawks and owls.

Coordination 4d

Sense 4d

Skills: Brawl 3d (3d), Dodge 3d (7d), Endurance 2d (2d), Perception 6d (10d), Stealth 2d (5d for Owls) (6d or 10d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Leg	1
2	Right Leg	1
3–4	Left Wing	1
5–6	Right Wing	1
7–9	Torso	2
10	Head	1

Damage

Width—1 in Shock

Bear

For large bears such as polar bears or grizzlies add a wound box to each hit location.

Body 6d

Coordination 2d

Sense 3d

Skills: Athletics 2d (8d), Brawling 3d (9d), Dodge 1d (3d), Endurance 4d (10d), Intimidation 6d (6d), Perception 1d (4d), Stealth 1d (3d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	7
2	Right Rear Leg	7
3–4	Left Foreleg	7
5–6	Right Foreleg	7
7–9	Torso	16
10	Head	6

Damage

Width + 1 in Killing

Canine, Normal Dog

Includes medium-sized dogs not known for aggression, such as Dalmatians and retrievers.

Body 1d

Coordination 2d

Sense 4d

Skills: Athletics 2d (3d), Brawl 2d (3d), Dodge 1d (3d), Endurance 2d (3d), Perception 2d (6d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	2
2	Right Rear Leg	2
3–4	Left Foreleg	2
5–6	Right Foreleg	2
7–9	Torso	5
10	Head	3

Damage

Width in Shock

Canine, Large Dog

Includes medium-large dogs known for strength and aggression, such as Rottweilers, German shepherds and Doberman pinschers. The Command Stat is for trained guard and attack dogs only.

Body 2d

Coordination 2d

Sense 4d

Command 2d

Skills: Athletics 2d (4d), Brawl 2d (4d), Dodge 1d (3d), Endurance 2d (4d), Intimidation 3d (3d), Perception 2d (6d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	3
2	Right Rear Leg	3
3–4	Left Foreleg	3
5–6	Right Foreleg	3
7–9	Torso	7
10	Head	4

Damage

Width in Shock

Feline, Wild Cat

Includes such felines as bobcats and ocelots.

Body 1d

Coordination 4d

Sense 5d

Skills: Athletics 2d (3d), Brawl 2d (3d), Dodge 1d (5d), Endurance 2d (3d), Perception 2d (7d), Stealth 4d (8d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	2
2	Right Rear Leg	2
3–4	Left Foreleg	2
5–6	Right Foreleg	2
7–9	Torso	5
10	Head	3

Damage

Width in Shock

Feline, Big Cat

Includes such felines as leopards and jaguars.

Body 3d

Coordination 3d

Sense 4d

Skills: Athletics 2d (5d), Brawl 3d (6d), Dodge 1d (4d), Endurance 2d (5d), Intimidation 4d (4d), Perception 2d (6d), Stealth 3d (6d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	5
2	Right Rear Leg	5
3–4	Left Foreleg	5
5–6	Right Foreleg	5
7–9	Torso	10
10	Head	4

Damage

Width in Killing

Feline, Huge Cat

Includes lions and tigers.

Body 5d

Coordination 3d

Sense 4d

Skills: Athletics 1d (6d), Brawl 3d (8d), Dodge 1d (4d), Intimidation 6d (6d), Perception 2d (6d), Stealth 3d (6d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	6
2	Right Rear Leg	6
3–4	Left Foreleg	6
5–6	Right Foreleg	6
7–9	Torso	14
10	Head	6

Damage

Width in Killing

Horse

A horse can run about twice as fast as its Body score would indicate.

Body 5d

Coordination 3d

Sense 3d

Skills: Athletics 5d (10d), Brawl 1d (6d), Dodge 1d (4d), Endurance 3d (8d), Perception 2d (5d).

Hit Locations

Height	Location	Wound Boxes
1	Left Rear Leg	6
2	Right Rear Leg	6
3–4	Left Foreleg	6
5–6	Right Foreleg	6
7–9	Torso	12
10	Head	6

Damage

Width in Shock

Appendix B: How to Play a Roleplaying Game

By Greg Stolze

For the past ten-plus years of my life, I've been writing roleplaying games. I've been playing them for much longer. Back when I started, you could abbreviate "roleplaying game" to RPG without people immediately thinking about "rocket propelled grenades," and the acronym is still around causing trouble today.

In that time, I've watched the market bulge, shrink, grow, recede and, constantly, change. The consensus as I write this is that the hobby is shrinking. To counteract that, of course, we need to recruit new players. Hopefully, that's you.

RPGs are fun. They're worthwhile. They take more effort than a computer game but I believe you can get a different kind of payoff. Give it a try and you may agree. But I'm not just going to ask you to baldly trust my assertion. I'm going to explain the appeal of this peculiar habit that's absorbed so much of my time. In the process, I'm going to show you how to get the most fun out of it, by being a good player. At the same time, I'll warn you about the pitfalls of being a bad player. It's the whole package. Enjoy.

What's Gaming?

"It's like Cops and Robbers, only with dice and rules to curtail the endless round of 'I hit you!' 'No you didn't!' disputes."

That's one standard explanation, but it's really only the thin edge of the wedge. It's the first step into the territory, but it merits some expansion.

Like Cops and Robbers, in roleplaying games you pretend to be someone else. Only in games, the characters are far more detailed than the generic cops or robbers who run around the yard shooting

each other. The characters in RPGs are more like characters in novels or TV shows—they grow and change over time, they have tastes and history and quirks and motivations. They exist, not only to do things, but also because they're interesting in and of themselves.

RPGs are games built through, and around, stories. The story progresses as the game is played. There isn't a winner or a loser, and there isn't a board, but there are dice and rules... a radical departure from standard Cops and Robbers.

The stated reason that most games have all these rules, with dice or cards or other random number generators to provide absolute impartiality, is that it "keeps things fair" and "resolves uncertain actions." I'm going to break with tradition and assert that this is a crock.

The dice are impartial, but their application and interpretation can be confusing and subjective, giving a decided edge to the guy who understands the rules best. The more complicated the game, the more advantage accrues to that guy. Known in the parlance as a "munchkin" or a "rules lawyer" or a "min-maxer," he's a player who tries to build his character for optimal performance in some area of play (stereotypically, it's combat). He also plays his character in such a fashion that events are resolved through his character's strengths. This is regarded as a bad thing.

Yet I find myself hesitant to dismiss a player who puts that much effort into his game. If only there was some way to harness that drive and make it a force for Good, not Annoyingness. Hm...

I got off on a tangent there. I was talking about dice and impartiality and resolving disputes. If you

really wanted an impartial dispute resolution system, reach in your pocket and grab a coin. Heads you win, tails you lose. Bingo. Fair, impartial, and easy to understand. Let's tell our story!

The only problem with this is that, if you're telling a story about people with superhuman powers, the coin-flip gives Lois Lane a fifty/fifty chance of knocking out Superman with one sucker punch to the jaw, which any reasonable person knows is impossible (barring the presence of Kryptonite or red sun radiation).

On the other hand, it seems reasonable that Lois would have some chance of decking Lex Luthor or Jimmy Olsen. What's needed, then, is some way of determining which chances are "reasonable."

Enter the Game Master. In gaming's frenzy of acronymming, she's called the GM.

For Cops and Robbers, no one wanted some know-it-all standing on the porch saying, "Tommy, you can't hit him! He's around the corner and bullets only go in straight lines!" Or, in our comic book example, "Give it up Lois. He's a strange visitor from another world."

RPGs are more complicated than Cops and Robbers because the characters and roles are more involved, and the setting is more complex, and the events have both more factors influencing them, and more repercussions arising from them. So I think we can set Cops and Robbers aside.

Football has impartial referees to pass judgment on the teams, and a GM is something like that. The rules of the game serve the same purpose, providing an agreed-upon structure. What is this structure for? It provides the logic of the setting.

The Logic of the Setting

Okay, I'll try really hard not to be overblown and pompous here. But RPGs come with their own little worlds, an imaginary map on which the characters move. But this isn't just a map of physical places, it's a map of events and people and govern-

ments and starships and beliefs and magic spells and battle tactics and... well, everything that makes up a world, supposedly. RPG stories aren't told in the real world, because the real world is taken up with our lives. So we build a pretend world, out of words and consensus, and we tell stories there.

The advantage to making your own world, obviously, is that you can depart radically from reality. In *Wild Talents*, a man can fly and a woman can knock him out of the sky by throwing a small coffee shop at him. Depending on your setting, there could be kids whose exposure to radiation gave them heat vision instead of leukemia. The awfulness you need to fear isn't a terrorist, it's a mind-controlling sociopath. Unless it's a mind-controlling terrorist sociopath.

Does the coffee shop hit the flier? Can the telepathic terrorist be stopped? The rules and dice are there to resolve these issues, not by a fifty-fifty coin-flip, but with degrees of likelihood.

Believe it or not, degrees of likelihood are fun. They don't sound fun, but watch people playing poker—they're calculating degrees of likelihood. Betting on a football game, playing the stock market or bellying up to the roulette wheel are exciting and fascinating because there's uncertainty, but it can be managed. You pick the horse with the best record on muddy track or you fold instead of drawing to an inside straight. Interacting with uncertain events and testing your judgment against them is neat, and that's part of the thrill of gaming. Only instead of betting your hard-won real-world cash, you bet the fate of a character you've created, being rewarded with more power, glory or knowledge when you win... or being punished with humiliation, injury or even that character's death when you fail.

Understanding the rules means understanding the logic of the setting, which means understanding how things are meant to go. Now's a time when it's helpful to compare games to fiction. Characters

in soap operas behave differently than characters in action movies, because they're different types of stories. A character on *Days of Our Lives* is unlikely to resort to Tae Kwon Do to resolve her problems, because in that setting success arises from emotion and social interaction—you can't just spinning-back-kick your troubles away. Furthermore, Jackie Chan can take on legions of enemies armed with nothing more than a ladder. In *Saving Private Ryan*, a grittier ethos is in place (and rightly so). Am I comparing apples to oranges? Yes, but only to explain why you need different tools to get the juice out of each.

The One-Roll Engine has a lot of parameters that can be tweaked and altered to change the tenor of events. Agreeing on a tone beforehand with the GM lets him get the rules on everyone's side, generating random events that feel reasonable while still providing surprises. In one GM's game, it may not be unfair to expect even a normal person to survive that hurled coffee house, as long as that survival is good for the story. Other GMs may tend to go with the One-Roll Engine's baseline bias towards gritty, gruesome death. Be sure you know which way your GM rolls to avoid nasty surprises.

Why is this 'Fun'?

Wild Talents is, in a lot of ways, a traditional roleplaying game. Like most games in the mainstream, it has character generation—some means by which players create characters who roam through the world having adventures, making huge messes and/or cleaning up huge messes. It has a combat system that resolves physical conflict, often in loving, minute detail. It offers a variety of settings, with pages and pages of description intended to evoke a particular feel or flavor or style of game.

Most games have these things because all these factors entertain. In one way or another, those three elements cover nearly everything that's fun about RPGs.

Character Generation, or, The Joy of Ham

It's a good time, pretending to be someone else. If you agree with this statement, you probably don't need the rest of this section and can skip right down to the bit about fighting.

All right, for all you skeptics: Inhabiting another role is entertaining in and of itself, at least for many people. It makes a nice change from the day to day life of a parent or a plumber or a punk teenager—instead of acting the way you always do, because it's right or expected or you'll get fired if you don't, you get to act out. If you're normally laid back and noncommittal, you can find out how it feels to be a passionate, noisy troublemaker. Since it's all in fun, all in the game, all in a made-up world, it doesn't count. For many, the chance to have a change of pace in the form of a change of behavior is reason enough to game, period. Not to mention the opportunity to use outrageous accents and gesture wildly. (I'm thinking right now of one of my most flamboyant players, who by day is an educator and presumably can't run around screaming, "So angry! So angry! I'll piss on your shoes when you're dead!")

Pretending to be someone else can vent ya-yas whose expression is otherwise unacceptable, what with the violent murders and shoe-pissing and all. But there's more.

Playing another role can go deeper and have a more profound impact than the superficial level of wilding and ranting and blowing off steam. Like theater or literature, game stories can confront characters (and, through them, you) with truly challenging issues. Your character could end up deciding whether a mother or father gets the kids in an acrimonious divorce. You could be wind up deciding if you want to capture a vigilante who killed a villain no one else could touch, just let her get away with it. Your character might need to give up

Trouble: The Overactor

Some players invest very little in their characters and get little out of them. That's really their lookout, and as long as they're contributing to the game they're only hurting themselves. One group of players who damage the collective are actually those who get too far into character.

This can take two forms. The first is someone who gets too solidly into a role that doesn't contribute or which actively impedes the rest of the group. Say, for example, four of your players create gallant, patriotic British spies who just happen to also be reincarnations of four Arthurian knights. Good, fun chivalrous espionage action there. But the fifth creates a self-interested businesswoman and computer hacker who's sole goal is her own comfort and aggrandizement. She doesn't even like to travel.

This contrast can work, if the player is willing to let her character grow into being a loyal Briton with the others. The contrast can actually provide a lot of friction, interest, and comic relief. That's not a problem.

It's a problem if the player constantly tries to pull the Round Table out of this week's adventure because her character has no interest in it. She wants to get back to Liverpool and work her intrigues and have the spies serve as her pawns and patsies. If anyone calls her on this spotlight-hogging, she says, "Hey, I'm just staying in character."

As if staying true to a toxic character is somehow a virtue.

Players like this need to understand that they don't call the shots, that the group isn't there to serve their pleasure at the expense of their own, and that it's okay for selfish, odd-duck char-

acters to grow and change so that they work better with the rest of the party.

The other problem thespian player is the one who may work very well in the party, and has no need to be a jerk or a control freak... but he meanders. He enjoys playing his character so much that going to the shop to pick out a new space suit is as exciting as a clandestine mission to extract a prisoner from a tightly-guarded prison moon. He jaws on and on (in character), maybe amusingly, maybe only amusing himself, while everyone else sits around drumming their fingers on the table... or worse, discussing their latest DVD purchases.

A little in-character chatter is great. Some groups are composed entirely of meanderers and for them, that works. They can have long, involved, satisfying campaigns in which very little happens except that their characters were interestingly characterized. The problems arise when you get more typical players who have a heavy interest in plot and mechanics, and who see the in-character noodling as pointless. They're not out of line. In his own way, this meanderer is as much of a spotlight-hog as the selfish control-freak, but in this case the fix is much simpler. The GM just has to give him opportunities for in-character behavior within the scope of the plot. Ideally, these chances let him contribute to the success of the party. In the space jail example, he'd probably be just as happy developing his character by fast-talking the guards into letting the party land their supposedly-crippled ship there for emergency repairs. The difference is, now the other players are happy with the character too.

true love for honor... or for peace or just for political advantage.

RPGs, like all stories, can present us with choices between conflicting values (or conflicting perils). With the remove of knowing it's fiction, we get all the interest and excitement of making important decisions... without having to actually deal with the unpleasant consequences that such choices have in real life.

Furthermore, by playing a character very different from oneself, you can make those choices based on different values, combining the joy of thinking through the tough stuff with the joy of chewing the scenery.

Combat: The Crimson Bliss of Power

RPGs grew out of wargames and it shows. Combat is nearly universal in these games, and for good reason: It's an intense, dramatic and exciting form of conflict, one everybody can understand. If you think you'd enjoy having your proxy in the game mow through hordes of unfortunate enemies with endless bolts from his untiring wrist-blasters, you

probably get it and don't need a lecture on the desirability of specific combat rules.

But maybe you do need that lecture. Maybe you think fighting should be just another character element, like looking good and speaking suavely and being an unfairly-cashiered Navy captain. Why does "badass fighter" get a whole chapter devoted to it when "compelling public speaker" does not?

Here's why: Fighting is the lowest common denominator. A fist to the face is a language everyone understands. So too in gaming. A player who doesn't have the verbal skill to engage in a legalistic duel of wits can still stack his character to dominate in combat—and it's a lot easier to drag the courtroom down to a brawl than it is to elevate a fistfight into articulate discourse. Furthermore, the consequences can be severe. You fail to grasp the nuances of manners and your character looks like a clod. You fail in battle and his skull could become your arch-enemy's new goblet.

Beyond its intensity, and the possible permanence of its outcome, *Wild Talents* has complex fighting rules because many players like them. Strategy is fun. Chess has been popular for centuries. Furthermore, figuring out a complex set of



Trouble: The Powergamer

The stereotypical min-maxing twinkie combat munchkin abuses character generation to get a character who is staggeringly efficient at fighting, often at huge expense to his abilities in other areas. This is because he is not concerned with exploring the nuances of character, or appreciating the interesting elements of the setting. He's going to ignore that stuff and get to fight scenes, which he will win, so that he can get Willpower and Experience Points, which are plunged into optimizing his character for more combat. Furthermore, whenever any other player tries to do something besides fight, he finds a way to sabotage it. Even when the other characters can fight, he seeks out means to hog the spotlight, be the most powerful warrior, and suck up as much of the GM's time and attention as he can. As far as he's concerned, the game is about his character's prowess and glory, full stop. The other characters are sidekicks, barely more important than the endless parade of enemies. The setting is just a backdrop. The GM's ideas about theme or motive, or intrigue or story or meaning, are dismissed with a resounding "Who cares?"

Doesn't this guy sound like a pain in the neck?

Luckily, this pure-form stereotype is rare, and if you do run into one your GM has ample justification to give him the boot. Honest. Tell her I said it's her sovereign duty to expel him for the good of players who aren't jerks. But really, it should almost never come to that.

If you're a min-maxer, odds are good you don't realize how annoying you are. Quick, who's the most irritating player in your group?

If you don't have a ready answer, it may be you. The good news is, help is here if you aren't doing it on purpose.

To cure munchkin syndrome, you just need to understand that RPGs aren't about winning, aren't about getting the most power-ups, aren't about being the toughest, and aren't about hogging the spotlight. These games work best when players are working half for their own characters, and half for the good of the game as a whole. One of the biggest rewards RPGs offer is the opportunity to keep playing, but that's a cruddy payoff if every player is trying to one-up everyone else. No one wins at RPGs, but it's perfectly possible for everyone to lose.

If you want to be the best fighter in the group, that's fine... as long as the players rally around that idea and there's enough GM attention to go around. Many other players actually don't like combat all that much and are more into characterization or just grooving on the setting and plot. If you're a combat monster player, you can be a great fit with players who couldn't care less. All you have to collectively do is understand when you need to step back and let the expert do his job. For them, that's solving mysteries or making diplomatic overtures or coming up with the overarching master plan for world domination. For you, it's when diplomacy fails.

Most players just need to have it explained that there is a wider view of cooperation, and then they perceive it, pursue it, and are willing to take turns with the spotlight. Those who can't are probably real crybabies and your game's better off without them.

rules is, for many players, very engaging. It's interesting to try and optimize a character to succeed at a difficult task.

This is known as min-maxing and, as I mentioned earlier, it's got a bad reputation. But as I also mentioned earlier, putting a lot of attention into the game is something I'd like to encourage. So I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest that it is not the min-maxing itself which other players find so annoying, but rather a host of behaviors that usually accompany min-maxing. Many of these can be dealt with, and advice for such dealing is in the nearby boxed text.

Setting and the Sedentary Compensations of the Couch Potato

Wild Talents has an elaborate backstory with the rise of superhumans in World War II, dozens of surprising events and interesting characters, it has (as of this writing) at least two alternate settings in the works and it has a lengthy Ken Hite article on building a setting from scratch. Setting gets a lot of pages, a lot of thought and a lot of attention.

Why, though?

Chess doesn't need a setting, nor does Cops and Robbers. But RPGs do because events and circumstances form character, and without characters in your game you're not really playing a role. Setting matters for the same reason that character matters, because it shapes the story.

Different settings provide different pleasures. Hard SF gives a glimpse into a future that will never be, while historical revisionism offers an alternative past that never was. Comic book settings let players find out if flight really is better than invisibility, which is a meditation on power and temptation all on its own.

In short, the outré and bizarre settings of RPGs give us a break from the real world, just as play-

ing characters offer us a break from our real selves. Furthermore, the kind of profound and literary emotions stirred by a deeply-empathized character going through a wrenching and difficult choice are mirrored in the tragedies or triumphs of nations in conflict. All within the safety of fiction.

Setting provides a chance to explore alternate societies, places of unreal grandeur and bizarre philosophies based on a world that isn't wedded to that purse-lipped controlling spouse Logic. In a word, setting provides spectacle.

There are many gamers who find settings interesting. They like having characters—possibly characters who are two-dimensional and rather passive—tour the regions, hear the neat descriptions, run into fascinating denizens, and engage in hand-to-hand combat with them. They're not obsessed with finding the optimum killing attack in every situation, they're not chewing the scenery, they're enjoying richness of the setting. This is the third joy of gaming: Seeing what new marvel the GM or the game designer has to show you this week.

The only real problem setting-explorers is that they sometimes are little bit too laid-back.

Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It

With all that stuff about character, system and setting in mind, just what are your duties as a player? When you play, what are you expected to do?

Show Up

Most obviously, you're expected to be there and be a warm body. Gamers refer to "sessions" which means (for example) that I'm going to be at Thomas' house around 1:00 on Sunday afternoon, and we'll play the game until 5:00 or so, then meet again the next Sunday for another. Most games go from session to session, like issues of a comic book—there's usually a session climax, but the characters con-

Trouble: Mr. Lazybones

Some players are used to being spoon-fed their entertainment by TV and movies. I love the tube and the theater as much as the next guy (though I'm just lukewarm on spoons), but gaming requires more investment. You have to figure out what your character's doing and have at least a sketchy rationale for why he's doing it.

The lazy gamer, however, just goes with the flow. He likes to hear about the cool spaceships and brutal bloodbaths. He contributes, he has ideas but... he's passionless.

This can actually be just fine.

If you are having fun and keep showing up, don't worry that you feel no urge to produce in-character journals, or use CAD software to lay out a secret base, or indulge in all the other diversions of geek-craft typical to character-ham players. (There's no shame in it if you do, though. I've personally done some lovely colored-pencil character sketches.) Maybe your big reward is the company of your friends, together, gaming. Or doing whatever.

This is okay. Arguably, you're getting less out of it than the frothing and committed fanatics, but that's your choice. In fact, laid-back players make a fine counterbalance for those whose natural instincts make them want to hog the spotlight.

The problem arises when you get a whole group of passive players. They expect to be fed a plot with several options, they casually discuss them until they pick, then they roll dice to see how it turns out. Lather, rinse, repeat, see you next week.

If that's your situation, someone needs to step up. Someone needs to invest some energy

and thought into the party and push in a consistent direction. If you don't take that initiative, either someone else will, or the game is doomed.

Maybe the person who puts the pepper in the recipe is your GM. Most experienced players prefer to be the ones making plans and developing strategy: When there's really only one path to follow, the game might as well be a scripted computer game. This is called "railroading" and while it's widely despised, it's widely known for a reason, and that reason is that it works... kinda. It's far from optimum, but it's better than having a game flatline due to terminal apathy. Many GMs, rather than see that happen, put the game on this sort of bossy life-support system. Just like a respirator in a hospital, it's an artificial method of doing something a body ought to do.

As a player, you're there to have fun, but you also have a responsibility to contribute something fun for others. (In fact, helping others have fun is, itself, fun—having your creativity appreciated by an audience is one of the primo perks of the GM job, I find.) If you're uncertain or shy or don't trust your ideas, it's okay to hang back—especially if your group is full of people who aren't shy and don't hang back. The role of audience is necessary, if not exactly glamorous. But don't be afraid to speak up when you become comfortable. Maybe even a bit before that, just to get practice. After all, it's all imagined, and the only repercussions are to characters who don't really exist and can't sue you.

tinue to press on towards a larger goal that takes many sessions to accomplish. If you're going to be part of a gaming group, make the time commitment or explain to the GM that you won't be able to be there every time. If you're only showing up every other session, get used to sketchy rundowns of what you missed, and get used to plots that focus on the people who are there consistently. No one's demanding Cal Ripken-like perfect attendance, but it's hard for a GM to center stories on your character if she doesn't know if you'll be present.

If you like gaming but your schedule just won't let you commit to your group, there are a couple ways around it. If the plot and structure permit it, your character may just be intermittent—like a recurring character on a TV show who isn't in every episode. Otherwise, you may have to agree to let the GM control your character while you're away, expecting her to play it safe, not take big risks, and not depict him getting drunk and fathering a slew of illegitimate children (unless, of course, that's the character you want). Alternately, you can let your fellow players run your character by consensus in your absence. Neither one is a perfect solution but, hey, it's an imperfect world.

Pay Attention

You can't expect to be spoon-fed the joy like you can with passive media. Gaming is interactive: If you don't respond to what's going on, it doesn't work. This means you're expected to understand the rules. Total command of every nuance isn't required, but have a general idea of how the game's mechanics kick in to determine success or failure. Pay particular attention to rules that come into play a lot for your character. *Wild Talents* has guidelines to let you design and operate just about any crazy power you can imagine. If you're going to create something wiggly and intricate, master the rules for it. If you don't want to do that, slather on some Heavy Armor and buy Hyperstats—that's perfectly viable.

You probably don't need to study how magic works if your character isn't going to be casting spells. If she is a sorceress, understand the game's idea of magic. Not only does this keep you from dragging the pace of the game to a crawl as you look up the rules, it makes your character more effective since you actually know what she can and cannot do.

More than that, follow the script. Pay attention to what the GM tells you. Remember the characters' names, and if you can't remember them, write them down. In a mystery novel, the detective eventually puts the pieces together. In a game with a mystery plot, those pieces aren't going together unless the players do it. You don't need to be obsessed, but you do need to be invested.

Let It Go

Involvement yields enjoyment... until things go poorly. It's quite possible to spend multiple sessions building a great and powerful character and then, through the cruelty of a few bum rolls, your character dies. Or goes insane or breaks his magic helmet or undergoes some other miserable setback that certainly wasn't in your plans. When that happens, you have to be philosophical.

It is possible to enjoy the death of your character, if it's a kick-ass death. If you go down swinging and are overwhelmed, while the other characters survive and complete the mission, that's about as heroic as it gets. It's particularly poignant if the GM lets you get in some cool last words like "Tell Martha I always loved her" or "Avenge me, Night-sun!" or "I'm lucky. I get to rest, knowing I did my best. You, my friend, must continue the struggle."

Far more often, the setback won't be something so dramatic. You roll badly and the villain makes you look silly. Your character throws up at the drinking contest. You bungle an easy task and, instead of being suave and cool, your character looks like a ninny.

If you're willing to take those lumps without taking it personally, you may enjoy the setback as comic relief. Failing that, you can look at it as the background for the eventual triumph. After all, in movies the hero typically gets knocked around a lot before his final success. You can't have a dramatic, come-from-behind, underdog victory if you've always succeeded at everything. If you can negotiate a course between apathy towards the game and obsession with it, you can groove on the highs and shrug at the lows.

It's not just character problems that can stick in your throat, either. It may be that your GM misinterprets a rule and your character suffers for it. Let it go. Every pro ball game has some bad calls, and GMs aren't perfect. Many great GMs sacrifice complete fidelity to the rules in order to keep the game moving at an exciting pace, or to provide for a better plot in the long run, or simply because they made a mistake. If you really must make a case for a different interpretation of some specific text in the book, talk it over with your GM after the session. Nothing makes a GM defensive like being criticized in front of the other players, because she needs to have some authority to run the game. Even if she admits it was wrong, don't hold a grudge and don't demand some kind of redress. Just accept that bad calls happen to good characters and hope that the next fumble goes in your favor. Usually, they balance out.

Share

The game is not about your character, it is about your group's characters. If your GM is doing her job, you get your time to excel and look like a champion, and so do the other players. One very common complaint about bad players is that they're RPG ball hogs—they want to be the most important actor in every scene. When you get a group of these attention magnets together, it's ugly. It's like babysitting toddlers on a rainy day.

Good groups, on the other hand, support each other. Suppose events have been building towards Leon's character Xanthar's confrontation with Senator Grimwine. Your last several adventures have involved finding evidence to link Grimwine with the plot to blow up the Pentagon, and now Xanthar (the good looking and eloquent interstellar diplomat) is going to present what you know. But, in a surprise twist, Grimwine shows up to frame him. It's down to a battle of wits.

Leon's a big ham, so he's got all kinds of speeches planned. If you're a good player, you sit back and let him have his moment in the sun. If you're a bad player, you have your stuttering power-blaster attack Grimwine so that it degrades into a big fight scene (that's the Powergamer tactic). If you're a great player, you find some way to enhance Xanthar's speech. Even simply shouting "Hear hear!" when he makes a good point can work. Most essential, though, is respecting his turn in front. If you do that, Leon's far more likely to enjoy a scene where Xanthar talks about what an indomitable warrior your character is (or expert sailor, or smooth loverman, or whatever your character concept is).

Contribute

In the spirit of aiding Leon and Xanthar, learn how to contribute to the game. The more you put into it, the more enjoyment you're going to get out of it, and that doesn't just apply to your character. If you're seeking ways to make other characters look good, their players just might return the favor. If you look for ways to make the GM's job easier, everybody benefits as the game runs more smoothly. If you show up planning to accept whatever you're given, you get something. If you show up wondering how you can make the game cooler for everyone, you get more. If everyone shows up focused on making the game great with their characters, instead of making their characters powerful in the game, you can get something spectacular.

Appendix C: How to Run a Roleplaying Game

By Greg Stolze

Running a roleplaying game is work. It's fun, it's rewarding, it stretches you and makes your mind function in new, exciting ways... but it's work. That's okay. Work is good. Anything worthwhile requires effort and attention, and in gaming especially, more effort and attention is likely to yield a better outcome.

If you've never run a game before, it can seem overwhelming. It's not. I don't know you, but I'll go out on a limb and assert that people dumber than you have run successful games. Running a game requires effort, but it's not something so esoteric and complicated that only a brain surgeon can do it.

The GM's duties boil down to this: When the players show up and their characters are ready, you present them with a situation. They react to the situation. You present the outcomes of their reaction. They react to those outcomes. Lather, rinse, repeat. The whole art of running games comes down to creating settings, stories and circumstances, then altering them as the PCs go through—altering them in ways that are fun, challenging, exciting, and which open new opportunities for continued play.

The GM's Basic Duties

Here's the meat-and-potatoes stuff: Plot, character, conflict. If you can accomplish these practical tasks, you're there, or at the very least you have an excellent start.

GMs who fail at these can be termed 'incompetent'. I'm not saying that to be unkind, but to distinguish them from the 'dysfunctional' GMs

I'm going to discuss later. If you take it easy, pay attention and keep everything in perspective, you should be able to run a game functionally and competently.

The Plot

A story is when things happen. Cool characters alone do not make for a good story, even if they're in a cool setting. Here, I'll show you.

"Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes walk into a bar. They have a few drinks, talk about last night's game, and then they go home."

That's not a story. That's not even a joke, because it doesn't have a punch line. Plot is the punch line.

A Quick Lexicon

On the off chance you don't know these acronyms...

PC: Not "Personal Computer" or "Politically Correct" but "Player Character". A character controlled by a player, meaning, not you. The PCs should be the most important characters in the game, though not necessarily the most powerful.

GM: "Game Master" or, if that's too S&M sounding, "Game Moderator". The person adjudicating the rules, presenting the plot and deciding the outcomes after the PCs make their choices. In other words, you.

GMC: "Game Master Character". Any character you control, that is, not a PC. Sometimes "NPC," for "Non-Player Character."

“Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes walk into a bar. Holmes says to Tarzan, ‘I bet I can predict what you’ll order if you let me examine your hands.’ Intrigued, Tarzan complies. Holmes squints at Tarzan’s fingernails, turns to the barkeep and says, ‘He’ll have seven shots of Scotch.’ ‘That’s incredible!’ says Tarzan. ‘How’d you know?’ ‘Because you had the same thing last night, you lousy drunk,’ Holmes replies.”

Now you’ve got conflict (can Holmes predict correctly?) and dialogue and interest and even a *dénouement*. (“*Dénouement*” is French for “Everything gets explained.”)

In this case, the characters drove the plot, because Holmes made his bet and initiated the conflict. You can’t always rely on your PCs to do that, so as a GM it’s a good idea to have an event developing—or even better, a couple of them.

Events for a plot should focus around a conflict (see below). They should involve repercussions that the characters care about. The characters should be able to alter the outcome, but it shouldn’t always be easy.

The rough outline of plot starts with some sort of introduction or story insertion or “plot hook”. It progresses through rising action, arrives at a climax, and then there’s falling action.

The Hook

This is what gets the players interested and, through them, the characters. To motivate characters, it helps to hold out rewards or threaten punishments, or both. If they’re going to miss out on the carrot and get swatted by the stick, it’s easy for them to tell what you want them to do. Great, right?

Yes and no.

I ran an informal online poll about bad GMs and one frequent complaint was about ‘railroading’—where the GM has a very concrete idea of where the story is headed and permits no deviation. Characters who act predictably get rewarded.

Those who don’t are humiliated, robbed, damaged or otherwise schooled.

While the GM is in charge of the world and what happens in response to the PCs’ actions, that doesn’t give authority over the PCs’ choices and decisions. This means you. It’s essential to respect the players’ free will when they’re deciding how their characters think, feel and act.

On the other hand, a GM who shows up with no preconceived ideas can’t be accused of railroading, but she can be accused of apathy. Ideally there’s an interplay between the characters’ desires and your plots, but you have to find a balance between cramming them into a script, and having nothing for them to do.

Luckily the gray zone between “strict control” and “nothing at all” is quite broad. The solution is to create a situation that’s unstable, introduce the characters, and let things play out in a manner that feels natural. Appeals to self-interest are good: So are insinuations of threat. Using both may be overkill.

The hoary old gaming cliché is that a stranger approaches the PCs in a bar with a treasure map. This became a cliché because it works: The appeal of gold and violence is enough for many characters. But let’s see if we can’t improve on it, hm?

The way you bait the hook can make it more appealing, and to find the right bait you need to look at the characters’ backstory.

“Backstory” means “everything that happened to the characters before the game began.” Sometimes the GM provides part of the backstory. (“For this game, you all have to be AWOL from a Marine Corps Talent unit, and you all have to know and get along with one another.”) Sometimes the GM provides all the backstory. (“You’re all the children of an aging billionaire who despises Talents and has spent his life attempting to find a ‘cure’ for the problem. Unbeknownst to him, you’re all Talents.”) Sometimes the GM doesn’t provide a thing. If you

Paper Tigers

Every so often, I like to throw some obnoxious and obviously inferior opponent (or opponents) against the PCs. Someone they can handily defeat without major consequences. Someone, in other words, who serves mainly as a foil so that the PCs get a chance to show off how buff they are.

The no-brainer example is the bully in the bar. He picks a fight, won't take no for an answer and winds up supine in the gutter with his teeth broken and his kidneys bruised. Many games offer a more social milieu, so the example might be a sneering lecher who gives the PCs a chance to befuddle and distract him so they can get the naïve coed (or other victim) out of the way.

There are no big moral issues here. There's no massive, plot-reinforcing reward. It's a chance for the PCs to show off, pure and simple. It's particularly easy, but also important, for characters with superpowers to be able to show them off. If you have a PC who's immune to fire, every now and again throw a fire at him. He wants his character to be fireproof. He paid good points for a fireproof character. He's not getting the game he wants if you decide, "Hm, can't put a fire in front of him because it'll be too easy."

Is this pandering? Well, a bit. But people play games because they're fun, and being a cool, competent guy who can handle himself adroitly is fun. One core element of gaming is escapism, and easy victory is a nice escape.

The problem lies with diminishing rewards. Throw up a paper tiger for a character once every three sessions or so, but no more than that. Make sure every character gets one periodically. Don't overdo it and—most importantly—make

sure they don't interrupt engagement with real tigers.

If every problem is easily resolved, it stops being a story about a cool guy doing neat stuff: It becomes an unstory, because the character never encounters a task that lives up to his abilities. If your players start taking success for granted, it's going to stop feeling like success.

Paper tigers remind characters that they're competent and can get stuff done. But they're intermittent rests between bouts with durable opposition.

go that last route, it's perfectly fair to tell the players to come up with a rationale for why they trust one another and are working together. Monitor the character generation process—you're the objective observer who can spot the character that's going to cause problems. ("Since the others are all playing loyal U.S. soldiers, having a noisy insurgent ideologue in the party may not work." Conversely, "You both want to make highly indestructible characters, and the party doesn't have anyone with much long-distance perception. Can you re-work a bit to address these issues?")

Many games gloss over backstory, and many GMs let the players write it but then don't pay much attention. That's wasteful. By examining what the players already decided about their characters' lives, you can suss out what issues concern them and what sort of game they want to play. For instance, if all your PCs are charming, sociable, control many lackeys and servants, and have low-to-absent combat skills, you're going to have some unhappy players if every problem requires a violent resolution. Conversely, if you give them plenty of chances to outwit, outmaneuver and downright lie

their way into power, they're playing the game they want.

A good hook, then, has the following:

- A promise of reward *or* some threat that must be met.
- A tie in to the character's backstory.

I'm also going to suggest it should have:

- An obvious way to get involved.
- Flexibility for when the characters ignore it or approach it obliquely.

Those last two are pretty important, even though you'll only need one of them. If your plot hook is set in Australia and the Los Angeles PCs have no easy way to get there... well, who would blame them if they shrug their shoulders and blow it off?

It's also possible that even the juiciest hook gets overlooked. Have a couple others on hand—preferably a plan B that can't be easily ignored. If the PCs decide that going out to the spooooooky, probably-haunted castle isn't the game they want to play, well, fine. Don't take it personally. Don't get upset and, especially, don't punish them somehow. They control their characters, so if they don't want to go poking around some manky dungeon, have an alternative. See if they won't nibble on something that keeps them in town, again something tailored to their interests.

No matter what plot they engage, try to be prepared for the unexpected. Players are creative types sometimes, maybe as creative as you, and they try to find their way around things in a way that hurts them least and helps them most. This is addressed at length under "Conflict" on page 351, but the same advice from there applies here.

Rising Action

Everything that builds up to a showdown and increases the tension is called "rising action". As a general rule of thumb, it consists of the characters making a gain or suffering a setback. You want your rising action to consist of a mix—some triumph, some failure—but you don't want to predetermine this. You do not want to decide, in advance, that the PCs succeed at the first encounter, lose in the second, succeed in the third and fail in the fourth. That's railroading at its most repugnant, even if you do it well and it seems natural to them.

Instead, I recommend a variety of encounters that you feel are balanced, with possible rewards and obstacles arising naturally from either success or failure. By 'variety' I mean situations that call for different skills—some social, some physical, some combative, some puzzling and so on. By 'balanced,' I mean that if you characters react with average intelligence and get average rolls, the outcome depends entirely on random chance. If they react really cleverly, they should overcome. If they're stupid, well, that should have fallout. All this is part of conflict, so—again—it's covered there, on page 351.

If your characters are waltzing through every encounter, tighten things up, especially in the beginning when you're getting your bearings with your PCs. Similarly, if they keep failing, maybe you're overestimating their abilities and need to ease things up a bit.

Let's suppose your proposed plot is "strange events at the abandoned Army base." A local real estate investor, Mr. Hook, has purchased the land and is pretty sure the rumors are bunk. But he'd like it checked out and for some reason (preferably backstory-related) he asks the PCs to look around.

The base has been commandeered by a mad scientist as a dumping ground for his failed experiments at building techno-zombies. You expect the zombies to be pretty tough—a notch or two above a paper tiger—but nothing the party can't handle,



even with a few bad rolls. Your plot is, they get rid of the shamblers and find clues pointing at the base's sinister past and the nearby villain. Your plan is for Dr. Deathnever over there to be the main antagonist.

You might decide to throw up some roadblocks before the characters even reach the base—just in the interest of building up gradually and letting the players get the hang of their new characters. First, they encounter a washout where a flooded river has swamped the road, stranding them with a garrulous local. If they can figure out a good way to get themselves over the river, they save some time. If not, they have to go miles out of their way. If they can get themselves and the local across, she's grateful and provides good information about the base.

When they get to the base they get their first inkling about zombies. Handled carefully, they can get in a good position and get tactical advantages. Handled badly, it's a slugfest.

See how this works? Events crop up in their path, with potential and risk, but nothing that's really derailing or seriously deadly... yet. You work up to that.

You can stretch out the rising action for some time. If the climax comes too soon, it won't stand out as special. If you delay too much, though, your players are going to get bored waiting for it. The optimal amount of rising action varies from group to group, so I can't give you a perfect number of sessions. Just be aware that your particular players might have wanted more or less.

Climax

The climax is the big finale in which the characters uncover enough of what's going on that they can take decisive action. It is often a great idea to set up the circumstances and then hand the resolution to the players. If you have a preconceived notion of the Right Way to handle the major issue, you'll resist different solutions that might be as good or

(let's face it) better. If you think Dr. Deathnever should be shown the error of his ways by means of eyebeams and stone-hard fists, and that the climax should be the clash of a thousand risen dead, you may be cheating your players of a different sort of satisfaction. Maybe they want to talk to Dr. Deathnever. Maybe they sympathize with the tragedy that drove him over the edge. Maybe it would be a better, more fun, and more satisfying game for them if they could redeem him and persuade him to direct his brilliance in a better direction.

For the zombie base example, perhaps the PCs sent a messenger to the cops requesting a SWAT team, please, while they engaged the enemy. Then they proceeded to lure the zombies into a series of deadly traps, dispatching some and chasing off the others without getting too badly hurt. They figure the cops are on the way to find what a top-notch job they've done, and then they'll have some back-up for chasing down the zombies that fled out into the desert. The sun's going down and no way are the PCs heading into unfamiliar terrain after dark.

That's when they see a decaying horde coming to them, silhouetted against the setting sun... and unlike the rejects they've been fighting, these rev-enants are fast.

Here's the climax: Can the PCs defeat the zombies? Do they need to take them all out, or is it enough to survive until the cavalry arrives? Did their messenger even get through?

You expect your characters to hole up in the base buildings and play at *Night of the Living Dead*. But it's also possible that they try to take the fight to the enemy, or that they make a run for it. Whatever they do, if it's the climax it has to be tense, exciting and constantly in doubt. If they flee, it has to be a thrilling chase scene until they get to the town... and then what happens? Are cops actually up to the challenge of fighting the techno-necro-beasties, or have the PCs just doomed them? If the PCs defend at the base, can they hold them off

despite exhaustion and limited numbers? If they go out to battle, do they have a prayer in the world?

The climax should be the biggest conflict in a plot line, and you don't want to clutter up a climax session with much fallout from side-plots or rising action stuff. Focus in on the big showdown or debate or battle or escape. Test your PCs to their limits, and—here's the important part—don't pull your punches.

When I say "don't pull your punches" I don't mean you should give your PCs an impossible challenge that inevitably kills them. You play the role of their enemies, but you are not their enemy. Your job is not to beat them, but to give them a fair challenge.

Part of the fairness is that the bad guys may win. If the PCs fail, don't torque coincidence so that they escape, and don't have some GMC show up to save their bacon (and make them look like chumps). Many players would actually rather have their characters go down to death fighting than get bailed out in a humiliating fashion by some pet character controlled by the GM. Better, many would prefer to leave their character in an untenable position if it saved the other characters. You can't really ask for a better end to your character's story than "He died saving everyone else."

Sometimes though, characters die stupid and pointless deaths. Depending on your feelings and your judgment of the game, you may opt to spare characters who died only because some lucky creep rolled an absurd string of unlikely successes. On the other hand, maybe you're just fine with characters dying pointlessly—especially if it encourages the other characters to play through their grief, and if it serves the plot.

By the same token, if they win, let them win. If you snatch their victory away at the last second by some petty and intrusive GM plot crank, do you think they'll be happy showing up to next week's session?

I'll be honest, I can't imagine what would make a GM want to abuse his players that way, but in that poll I ran, that was a common complaint—that the GM was cheating so that the characters always failed, or always failed if they didn't do exactly what the GM wanted. If that sounds like fun to you, I don't know what to tell you. Maybe running games isn't something you should do.

The end of a story should be like the end of a great novel or a great movie: Everything comes together, creating untenable tension, and then it snaps and reshapes events. If it's a good climax, no character comes away unchanged. That should be your goal.

Falling Action

At the end of the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* you get brief blurbs explaining what happened to everyone after graduation. That's falling action. After the climax, everyone adjusts to a new position. Here's where rewards, both in-game stuff like wealth and gratitude, and rules-stuff like Willpower and experience points, get parceled out and explained. This is a calmer sequence where the characters get a chance to work out how they feel about what happened and display that. It's also the time to plant seeds for future adventures.

Let's assume the characters bungled Dr. Deathnever's minions. They bailed out and the critters followed, killing one character after he fell off his motorcycle. The others got as far as the town and had time to panic the residents before the hordes showed up. The PCs and the cops managed to repel the zombies but only at the cost of terrible casualties. Now the zombies are back in the desert, the town is terrified and nobody's happy.

Maybe the characters decide to just get the hell away—they've done enough, the locals hate them and it's time to cut their losses. Maybe they're angry at Hook for sending them in unprepared. Maybe they think he should compensate them for the zombies they did wipe out. Or maybe they're

devastated by their failure and want to make it right, doing everything they can to help battle the scourge and rebuild the community.

Depending on how they play it, they could regain the people's trust, or make an enemy of Hook, or rally back to defeat the zombies (and ultimately Dr. Deathnever). If they do make a comeback, it's going to be far more satisfying because of this setback. But the beginning of the comeback story emerges in an ending of bitter defeat.

Conflict

Here we come to the brute, beating heart of it. Conflict arises when peoples' desires run into obstacles. The obstacle can be another person ("I'm in love with a supervillain's sexy daughter") or nature ("We have 24 hours to get this freighter of medicine to the outbreak before the plague reaches Stage Two, but there's a hurricane closing in on the dock") or some other circumstance ("I'm really poor, and I'd prefer to change that").

The samples above, by the way, are all external conflicts. That means they're something outside of the character being thwarted. There are also internal conflicts, where a character is literally her own worst enemy. Internal conflicts arise when a character has to make tough decisions between two bad outcomes ("If I lose this fight, I'll never reveal that the Senator is a mind-controlled pawn of the aliens, but the only way to win is by killing my long-lost sister") or has to choose between two conflicting goods ("I love her, but if I marry her I'll have to tell her what I really do on weekends, and she'd never accept my vigilante ways.")

How does a character overcome challenges? Is she direct and blunt? Does she seek the path of least resistance? Does she always try to choose honorably? Does she always seem to go for the most destructive, sadistic, harrowing option? All these things are a chance to be informed about

a character, and all these things give insight into what game the player wants to be playing.

Your job is to provide opposition. Not every problem has to be profoundly difficult—go back to page 347 for my little essay on cakewalks. But certainly some challenges should be, you know, challenging. Dealing with failure reveals as much character as capitalizing on success. More, probably. Don't be afraid to allow the characters to fail if that's how the dice fall out. (Players, don't be afraid to fail.) On the other hand, don't force them to fail by providing obstacles too powerful to overcome. Or if you do, do so because you're setting them up for grudgy rematch at the climax: That's perfectly legitimate. How many movies have the hero get beaten like an American cricket team in the first reel, only to get payback sevenfold at the end? Just make sure the players understand that the characters get another shot... if they earn it.

It's not impossible, of course, that your players may have their characters do something really stupid. If you've made a point of establishing how elite and deadly Task Force One is, and two of your PCs decide to charge them, with no strategy, for no very good reason... well, that's like touching a clearly labeled electric fence. In all likelihood, what's going on is something outside the game. The players are bored and want to stick it to you, see if you're going to hold to your cherished notion of the game or if you'll give them a break. If you want my opinion on this behavior, go read the section on "Leadership". Or maybe the essay on how to be a player. There's a dynamite section on kicking out troublemakers.

A pointlessly easy adventure is just as stupid and ultimately boring as a pointlessly hard one. Present them with middle ground. Make sure they know when they're probably getting in over their heads—or that they can get out mostly intact, anyhow.

Now, there's a big difference between a player who's being contrary (or stupid) and one who's

simply doing something you didn't expect. The first can take their lumps. The second you need to respect. For example, a group of PCs may meet the character you've designated as the game's major antagonist... and they may try to join up with him. What do you do?

The knee-jerk reaction is often denial. "Dr. Deathnever isn't hiring!" But why not? Why not let them be part of the problem for a while? Maybe even for as long as they like. Perhaps you can use their service to show them, up front, just how horrible Dr. Deathnever is. ("Well then, just break her neck and toss her down the chute labeled 'spare parts'! I'm a busy man, dammit!") If they get into it, clearly they want a game of being evil. You can deal with that by letting them get their ya-yas out until eeeevil just isn't fun any more. Then you can put out feelers about a redemption plotline, which could turn out to be all the more interesting for having trolled the depths before the slow climb to the heights.

It doesn't have to be a big moral curveball either. Perhaps you're planning a lively and lengthy game of deadly cat-and-mouse through the thickly forested emplacement of the Jungle Monks of Ereg, but your PCs decide, "Hell, we've got those crazy monks bottled up. Only two ways out of the jungle valley and we're ensconced at both. I ain't goin' in there. Let's just starve 'em out a couple months, see if they crack and, if not, go in after the leaves fall when we can see what the hell's going on."

This may be disappointing to you if you planned on that jungle hunt being the climax of your game. You can change-up on the fly though, and have the monks counterattack one of the chokepoints after the first month of blockade. Don't feel like you have to pull some alternate climax out of your sleeve: By going for a waiting option, your players are showing you they're willing to put up with more rising action. They're willing to gamble setbacks (as the increasingly desperate monks fall back on guerrilla

tactics or unleash secret weapons) on the hope of getting an advantage. That's fine. Save the climax for next session after you've had a chance to think of one.

When the players do something unexpected, don't punish them. Understand that they aren't trying to screw you. They're just trying to resolve the conflict, and you should be commended for creating one challenging and realistic enough that they're thinking creatively. Their unexpected action is a gift to you, like a reward for being a good GM. It's your chance to confront the unexpected—the same sort of excitement you've been giving them. Cherish it.

Rules Resolution

As GM it's your duty to drive the rules. You decide when a character can do something as a matter of course, when it has to be rolled for, and when it's simply out of the question. You evaluate penalties and hand out experience points at the end of the session.

This is a lot of power.

(You also decide how all the GMCs react to the PCs' actions, which is also a lot of power, but that's covered later.)

Because you have this power over the game, it behooves you to use it wisely, in the pursuit of everyone's fun. I'll say again that it's not your job to beat the players. Let's face it, if you want to beat the players—and by 'beat the players' I mean 'look like a jackass and ensure that your friends are miserable so you can ride some petty authority trip'—you will.

Instead, it's your job to keep the playing field level and to keep the game interesting. The O.R.E. has Difficulties and die-pool penalties as tools for making things harder (or bonuses for making things easier). You can use these, not only in response to what's being tried, but in reaction to what's at stake and how much it matters. You may

decide that a particular fact a character's trying to find in a library is both rare and irrelevant. In that case, you might want to just tell him he can't find it and move the game along. But if he's really adamant about wanting to know, you can give him the fact as a freebie—and move the game along.

Here's how you decide how challenging any given task should be, in no particular order.

- How difficult is it within the game setting?
- How big is the reward?
- Does it make the character look cool?
- Will it derail the plot without providing new opportunities that are as good?

Things that are more difficult according to the logic of the setting should have rules penalties—obviously, lifting lead bricks is harder than lifting clay bricks. That's the 'objective' difficulty.

If the reward for success is disproportionately large, you may want to raise the tension by making it more difficult.

Alternately, if succeeding makes the character look cool and isn't going to ruin some other player's plan, or bring the plot to a premature and less exciting end, you may want to keep it simple.

The plot consideration takes the most GM finesse. You don't want to cheat—either to ensure success or preclude it. But at the same time, you want the challenge to feel real and urgent. By keeping your finger on the pulse of the game, you can know when it's time to make things harder and when it's time to make them easier. Your first duty is to enable the players to tell a good story with their characters, not to give them a cakewalk or a steady diet of failure.

It's also a GM's job to understand the rules. When players have questions, they're going to ask you. You do not want to end up pawing through this book in the middle of the action while you re-

Keeping the Villain Alive

PCs tend to play for keeps. If someone gets in their way, their instinct is to instantly escalate to lethal force. On the surface, this looks like very sound tactics—nip a small problem in the bud before it becomes a large problem.

But it's poison for plot.

The best plot is one in which there is one unified issue or problem or enemy and, over the course of much effort and despite many setbacks, the characters either overcome it (and have a happy ending) or succumb to it (and die in tragic glory). If they find the bad guy who's in charge of it by the second session and whack him, that tends to deflate the plot.

One tactic is to have an enemy government or conspiracy or corporation. With big faceless collectives to battle, scraping off the leadership level is just one tactic. Someone new pops up and the Sect of Man-Made Gods continues. Nevertheless, having an identifiable face of evil is powerful. So here are some ways you can introduce an enemy individual and keep him alive long enough to really drive the characters mad with rage—which, in turn, drives the players mad with joy when they defeat him.

Dodge. A villain with spectacular evasion abilities who isn't shy about running like a whipped dog can survive a long time. It's indisputably frustrating to fight a guy you can't hit, but it's also hard to respect a foe when the most common comparison is 'he runs like a whipped dog'. But this can be made to work, if you're ready for them to mingle contempt with hatred.

Deadliness. PCs certainly respect an enemy who decapitates one of their tough fighters on the first pass of a fight. They may flee him,

especially since the O.R.E. has a reputation for deadliness. On the other hand, hysterical fear may make them feel cornered and force them to fight until only one group leaves. If it comes down to that, your plot is derailed no matter who wins. Deadliness is a good combination with the dodge emphasis, however. A guy who gets cornered and slices off a PCs' arm before escaping isn't someone to dismiss—as long as he flies away after proving himself. However, both combat-intensive survival strategies are far from foolproof, as the occasional unexpected underdog victory is a feature of this game.

Political Connections. If the bad guy is the local police chief, that's likely to give blood-thirsty PCs some pause. Setting your blaster to "Disintegrate" isn't just a matter of personal vendetta now, it's armed insurrection. The more political your game is, the better this works, since his followers are able to make trouble for the PCs. But not all PC groups operate legally, or maybe you want a villain who's an outlaw himself. While this is a good option, it's not universal.

Disguise. Perhaps their opponent is known only as "Mister Crimson," no one's seen his face and he has countless tricks to conceal his identity. Killing him isn't the issue—the immediate challenge is to find him. ("Paging Mr. Soze, Mr. Keyser Soze...") This also opens up the classic plot twist of having the nemesis' secret identity be a friend or ally of the PCs.

Achilles' Heel. Hey, Sauron didn't bother hiding from anyone. Some opposition has gobs of hardened Heavy Armor and Invulnerability, so they can only be destroyed by some highly specific and arcane means—destroy the One Ring, bullseye that thermal exhaust port, pour a small quantity of water on her. The drawback of this approach is that you may have one idea of

what the vulnerability is, but your PCs just can't figure it out, becoming increasingly frustrated with what looks like a railroad plot. There's an escape hatch to this, which is to simply decide that their most plausible theory about the weakness is correct (no matter how far afield it is from your plan). If you're okay changing your plot midstream, fine. If it's not to your taste, also fine—just be aware of the pitfalls.

10,000 Minions. Some games, you know your enemy, you're confident that you could wring his neck... but he's miles away in his black basalt fortress and the army between you and him is pledged to his defense. The only real problem with throwing waves of minions at the PCs is that it may start to feel repetitive. The cure is to spice the mix with other options: If this guy's got such a following, other authorities are unlikely to want to get on his bad side (political pressure) and while he himself may be no combat shakes, he could employ skilled body doubles (disguise) and bodyguards (dodge). It's especially juicy if that bodyguard is someone the PCs like or at least respect. If you can pull off that scene where they say, "In other circumstances, we would have been friends." "Yes, good ones. To the death, then?" "I'm afraid I can accept nothing less"—then you're golden.



fresh your memory about how somebody's "Fleshly Plasticity" power works.

If the mechanics seem too fussy or clunky to you, by all means change them. Altering rules so they suit your tastes is as honorable and reasonable as cutting the garlic in a recipe if garlic makes you gassy.

Most of the time, this sort of tinkering boils down to deciding how much authority you want to cede to the rules. This is a matter of personal

taste—just make sure your players know how it's going to go. If you're slanting simulationist or gamist, (meaning, you let random factors filtered through the rules be the ultimate arbiter) then study! Make sure you know how the PCs' skills or abilities or devices work so that you're consistent when they use them, or when they try some fancy maneuver. If you're going narrative (meaning, you apply your common sense and use the rules to sculpt outcomes), be really clear communicating to the players what they need to roll and get for this particular action, and strive to be as consistent as you can. Nothing ruins the fun of a game as much as the feeling that the GM is being controlling and arbitrary... unless it's a GM so hesitant that she's looking up rules in the big book every twenty minutes.

I'm not saying you shouldn't ever consult the manual during play, but try not to break tension or interrupt the flow of play to do it. Games have tense, fast-paced times and they have down times. If you must check the book, do it during down times.

Character

The players control the main characters. You portray everyone else. This is a big job. To make it easier, remember that not every waitress, or even every head honcho they meet, has to be as intricately detailed and elaborate as a PC. It's okay for a character to be sketchy or two dimensional if she's only involved for a few scenes and then dies to show how the monster works. The players can project a rich inner life onto that GMC if they want, but by and large they're more concerned with their own problems.

For the purposes of running GMCs, we can break them into four categories: Major characters, minor characters, antagonists, and extras.

Extras are people who are basically setting. They don't need to have individual names, they don't

need stats, they're there to take the PCs' hats and answer questions about where the bathroom is. In a fight, they're unworthy opponents, and any marginally competent fighter should be able to cow or clobber them without even rolling.

Minor characters get names because they recur and have some stake in the plot. The bombastic mayor who could be an ally or a pain in the neck is an example here: He's an element of plot, and he has a personality, and the PCs have to deal with him as an individual. Minor characters may or may not need stats, but they certainly don't need a full character sheet—a few simple notes like “Make inspiring speech, 7d” and “Resist fast talk and flimflam, 8d” may be enough for that local honcho. To portray minor characters, give them a memorable element or two—a particular way of dressing, a habit of speech, a big ghastly scar or some behavior tic—and keep that consistent. Even if the players don't remember the name, they may remember, “Oh yeah, the librarian's daughter with the stutter.”

Interestingly, the more the PCs interact with minor characters, the more real those characters become. Don't fight this. Some big and unexpected fun can arise as characters get promoted from “wacky neighbor” to “major ally”.

Antagonists may or may not get names, but their purpose is to put up a fight with the PCs, pure and simple. You may not catch the name of that Goliath with a big Harm pool and enough Extra Tough to outfit a football league, but he's certainly a cut above the hat-holder. Characters like this should have full combat stats, because their function in the plot is to have long, glorious fights with the PCs. (If your players don't care for battle, you may never need an antagonist. Most players care.)

Major characters are those who are involved again and again, and who either support the PCs and need their support in turn, or—most commonly—are the enemy against whom the characters strive. You're going to portray these characters

a lot, you're going to need to make coherent decisions on their behalf that feel real, so you need to get into their heads. These characters are, for you, as detailed as the PCs should be to the players. You should identify with them... as long as you don't fall into the trap of wanting them to be the main characters. The PCs are the main characters. Your major characters exist to provide plot and resistance to the PCs, so when it's time for them to fall back and let the heroes be heroes, do it gracefully. When your beloved villain dies at the PCs' hands, it should be the climax of climaxes, your death of Hamlet, but the PCs' big scene.

Description

At last, a GM task that isn't fraught with peril! With character, plot, conflict and rules—with all that stuff you have to keep a balance between fairness and story bias and fun maintenance and everything else, but description, ah! That's far, far less political.

Here's how it works. You play the character's senses. When they enter a scene, you describe it, telling them what they see, hear, smell and otherwise observe. Note: You don't get to tell them what they feel about what they're seeing. That's the player's job, though it rarely hurts to say something like, “Yeah, it looks like your brother struggled a long time before he died. Looking closer, you see they pulled his fingernails out. How do you feel about that?”

In fact, any time you want to stall while you figure something out, or just want to slow things down for pacing purposes, you can play psychologist and ask for a read on the character's emotions. Many players love to tell you about their characters.

Good description shows the important (or maybe just most obvious) stuff without bogging down in useless embroidery. Good description uses a lot of senses—on a battlefield the characters should

feel mud under their boots and hear the cries of the dying and the wounded, louder even than shouts of terror and command. They should taste smoke and smell blood with each breath as the sun beats down on the chaos.

When players ask for more details, supply it but don't sweat it. If there's no particular relevance to how a given GMC is dressed, you can make something up or just gloss over it—"He's dressed very nicely," isn't terribly evocative, but may communicate to the player that this isn't a detail that needs to matter much. Describing his furs and jewels may, however, communicate exactly how rich he is, or his taste, or his history. After all, a guy in a fancy cape-and-tights combo creates a much different impression than someone in an exquisitely cut but subtle gray flannel suit.

One pitfall to avoid is inconsistency. If there was only one door into the room a moment ago (or last session), saying that there are two now is going to confuse the players, snap the illusion and lower their trust in what you're telling them. This is a problem. How much of a problem depends on how major the disconnect. If it's a minor detail, you can shrug and move on—no one will care and no one should. Big things though, you need to get right. Take notes. Review them before the gaming group is all together. It doesn't have to be flawless... it just has to be better than the players' notes.

It's impossible (and undesirable) to catalogue everything in a given space. Tell them what's relevant but (here's the tricky part) be flexible with stuff that might become relevant. Just because no one noticed that there's a mop in the room doesn't mean the room has no mop: If a player asks "Is there a mop or something around?" your answer should depend, not on whether you put 'mop' on your mental list of room props, but on whether it's appropriate ("No, the Dark Master's private meditation chamber does not have a mop") and whether

you think they're going to do something cool and/or scene-wrecking with it.

Certain places, just by their nature, contain certain things. Characters in a gas station should be able to find gas cans and windshield wipers. Characters in a forest should have no trouble finding sticks and leaves. Characters in a library can find books, paper and ink. Even things that just might be in a certain place... it's often a good idea to let PCs find them, as long as it's plausible and they're not becoming ridiculously lucky. Giving the players a little bit of ownership of the setting opens possibilities for the characters. (Finding a broom in the abandoned factory, a character sets the bristles on fire and makes a torch. A PC maneuvers a guard onto a patch of ice before trying to trip him. A character whips up a simple but elegant meal from forage at the campsite.)

Furthermore, giving them that scope to imagine gets them invested in the game. If they have some authority to decide there's an incredibly heavy, elaborate and filthy spittoon in the tavern, they're more likely to produce some interesting and comical characterization or fight choreography involving a big dirty jar of drool. It gets them into it because it's theirs and they're making it, instead of having it be yours and they're just looking at it.

The GM's Advanced Duties

If you can manage the concrete elements of conflict, character, description and plot, you are a competent GM. That probably makes you a fun GM... as long as you're applying those skills the right way. But even a GM with encyclopedic rules knowledge, deft plotting abilities and a superb grasp of drama is going to fail if she is running the game in the wrong direction, or if she misunderstands the point of the exercise.

Here goes: The purpose of the game is for everyone to have a good time.

This would seem obvious, but many anecdotes indicate that people lose track of it. To keep your GM eyes on that prize, there are some rather more abstract concerns, above and beyond just knowing how trip attacks interact with charging attackers. There are elements of attitude. I hesitate to describe a "GM mystique" but certainly there are approaches that work and those that crash and burn. Here's what works.

Trust

Your players need to trust you to run the game. You need to establish a standard of fairness and stick to it. You need to make an effort to be consistent—with the rules, with the facts of description, with the personalities of your GMCs. They need to feel that they have a reasonable chance to make assumptions and predictions about the game world: If you're not consistent, there's no point in doing that. If you arbitrarily throw meaningless opposition at them whenever they try something unorthodox—or worse, whenever they're nearing success—they'll conclude that it's your game and that you're just using them for your own amusement without giving anything back.

Running a game is fun, making up the jungle-gym of the story is neat, but you have to trust the players enough to let them play on it—even if they're not playing the way you expected they would.



You need to trust them, too. You must be able to trust your players to make a real effort to interact realistically and to commit to their character. If they aren't doing that, you can't give them the game they want. If they're not involved with the character and don't really care, it doesn't matter what you put in front of them.

The difference is, when a GM doesn't trust her players, she has so much power over the rules, the setting and the GMCs that she may be tempted to try and 'encourage' the players to 'do it right'. Then you just get antagonism. Instead, you have to use all the tricks in the GM bag to seduce the players and draw them in. Give them spectacle and opportunity and challenge and excitement. Give them a fair game. Offered that, anyone with the potential to play well, will.

Tone Control

"Tone" means the emotional backdrop of the game. Is your game going to be gloomy and desperate, light-hearted and frolicksome, or somber and majestic? These are tone concerns, and they influence character, plot and description.

Decide on a tone before the game starts and you'll save yourself a lot of headaches—headaches that are hard to explain without considering tone, such as the dissonance caused when characters based on splatterpunk high-violence assumptions are tossed into a political game of intrigue and insinuation. Or the issues that inevitably crop up when one player's character is desperate, one is frolicksome, and one is majestic. Something's got to give there, or the party is going to constantly tug in different directions.

One way to communicate tone is to tell your players "This game is gritty and combat can be deadly fast, so be hesitant to escalate—the GMCs are." Or to say, "This is a talky game of somewhat satirical realpolitik—people do cruel things for absurd reasons, but as celebrities the characters

can often escape the consequences of their callousness." That's fine as far as it goes, but there's a difference between having a tone and merely asserting one. If you tell them what you're planning and don't follow through, you've misled them, and that's unlikely to turn out well. Part of the utility of the four-color design chapter (starting on page 165) is that it gives you and your players a set of numerical metrics to base expectations on.

Once you've set the tone, maintain it. Description is the most immediate and simple way to keep tone consistent. If the game has a tone of moral degradation (Black 2), and the PCs are the relatively-clean (Black 4) heroes who are going to fight the power, you can reinforce that by stressing details like muddy streets, graffiti, the potbelly on the mayor's mistress while urchins starve in the street... If your tone is bright and fully of shiny, heroic wonderment, you can describe the fresh air of the forests, the towering skyscrapers, the dewy rosebuds climbing the trellis at the community playground... any and all of those details might be in both games, but you've only got so much time in a session to describe things. Concentrate, then, on the details that fit the feel you're after.

Leadership

This is a big one, and tough. Gaming is fun, it's an entertainment, and most likely you're going to do it with a group of friends. Most of us don't like bossing around our buddies—we like to go along, get along, let consensus emerge in a laid back form of democracy.

That works... to a point.

In gaming though, the GM has more power. It's your setting and your plots and while the players have the main characters, the burden is on you. If a player skips a session, the rest of you can probably muddle through. If the GM blows it off, there's no game.

Like it or not, you're the leader while you're running the game. You should certainly be an enlightened despot who cares about her players' desires and who respects their input, but you can force things to happen in a way that players can't. I've cautioned again and again about abusing the authority that comes with being GM, but there's an upside to that authority as well.

The upside is, you can lead.

If you act a certain way, the players are likely to model that. If you prepare and have a good grasp of the rules, you can encourage them to do the same—hearing “Hey, before the game starts, you might want to brush up on exactly how long that spell takes to cast and how it works” from the GM carries a lot more weight if she's not running to the book every ten minutes. It also carries more weight than if it comes from another player.

If you break character in order to stick in a Monty Python joke during tense moments, the players are going to feel that's okay. (In your game group, maybe it is.) On the other hand, if you want your drama to be pure, you certainly have the right to shush a disruptive player who cracks wise at an inappropriate moment.

Some people, assertive people, find this very easy to do. If you're not assertive, you've got a choice. You can put up with enjoying the game less than you should, or you can screw up your courage and call out the tone-breaker. In most cases, the guy doesn't realize it bothers you and simply making your position clear one time suffices. But if a player consistently breaks the game... or is rude to you... or is being a jerk to the other players... well, you may need to kick him out. This, too, is a traditional role for the GM—policing individuals so that they don't screw with the collective. It's not necessary all that often, but when it comes down to it, you're better off booting the guy who can't play along. If you don't, the odds are pretty good that the game dies a slow, painful death anyway.

Fair Conflict

Why is gaming fun?

It can be for the same reason that chess is fun—you manipulate the rules to get an outcome you like. It can be for the same reason that poker is fun—you calculate probabilities in a system with random elements in pursuit of advantage. It can be for the same reason that a film or a play is fun—characters are put into trying circumstances and deal with them (or fail to deal with them in some compelling way).

The common element is conflict, opposition and obstacle. It has to be a fair conflict, too—anything else is unsatisfactory. (No one wants to play chess against an equal opponent if you start out down a queen and two rooks). But it also needs to hold out the promise of improvement. The character (or player) needs to be able to take concrete steps to better his odds and improve his situation. At the same time there needs to be the real risk of overreaching (or stagnating) and making the situation worse. This is what's behind all that rising action: Is the character on the right track? It's also what's behind falling action: Did he meet his goals?

Some GMs implement fairness by writing up a set of circumstances beforehand, balanced against the PCs' abilities, and then letting the chips fall where they may as the players attempt to navigate their characters through it. This ‘dungeon’ approach has a long and honorable tradition. If it works for you, okay. But it's prone to the ‘death spiral’ effect if you construct it strictly, in which one setback makes the next setback more likely, until a cascade leaves the characters writhing helplessly. If you can run a good tragedy, that works. Otherwise, you might find yourself interrupting your plans to bail out the characters—so building some wiggle room into the initial setup is a good idea. Rigid prep like this also makes it harder to respond when the PCs get some wild notion and jam off after it. No matter how much you try to prepare and anticipate,

some day they will make your jaw drop. Accept it, adapt to it and move on.

Other GMs go session-by-session, adjusting this week's challenge based on last week's actions. This requires constant effort, but it's easier to cleave to the players' goals, actions and current success level. The issue with this approach is that your game may drift and feel plotless. If everyone's having fun, that's not an issue. If it's starting to feel stagnant and pointless, you may want to pre-load a little more to get a greater sense of direction.

You're going to have to experiment and find out what works best for your group and yourself, but that's actually a big part of the fun of it—trying new things and enjoying unexpected successes. As long as you're fair with your players, they'll usually forgive quite a bit. As long as you put in the work, even average players can provide a more than ample payoff.

Being a *Wild Talents* Game Master

Here's a closer look at some of the specific challenges that may arise with *Wild Talents*.

The Iron and the Glass

I advised players to balance their characters' defenses in particular, so that you don't get one invulnerable character fighting side-by-side with someone more breakable. Anything that can even dent the iron is going to easily shatter the glass. You, the GM, can chime in during character development with "You might want to justify a few Hard Dice in Dodge there." But it's just as useful, perhaps, to take the guy with the ten layers of Extra Tough and Regeneration and Heavy Armor aside and tell him that you're not going to hit the characters with bunker-buster bombs. Promise.

On a larger scale, it helps to understand and establish some baselines for the setting. This isn't

tonal stuff with the four color bars, but solid mechanical limits. Point totals are a start, but once you start spending points, PCs and GMCs alike diverge so much that a ro-sham-bo balance is tricky. You may want to decide just how tough the toughest characters can be, or how strong. ("No more than 2hd or 10 dice total in Body.") This not only lets you decide how tough to make your antagonists, it lets your players make informed decisions about character design.

It can be desirable to build specific "opposite numbers" for characters, but only to a point. You want to have someone who stretches and challenges their powers, not someone tailor made to automatically facecrush them. If you've got a character whose reflexive hyperdodge makes him nearly impossible to hit, a good nemesis would be someone with area attacks that just can't be dodged. But that becomes a bad opponent when those area attacks do enough damage to take out the Artful Dodger with a single roll. Keeping him on his toes and forcing him to think up a clever strategy is good. Taking him out of his comfort zone is good. Cutting his feet out from under him and putting him in a position of helplessness is bad.

Balancing the iron and the glass is tough, but just try to keep these two simple principles in mind.

1) Your players didn't pick their powers so you could make them irrelevant. They picked them to tell cool stories about them being useful.

2) Your antagonists needn't have perfect knowledge. The guy who can take out the Artful Dodger may not consider the Dodger a threat and concentrate instead on the PC he can barely hurt. As GM, you know the relative strengths of all the characters, but the PCs don't and the GMCs don't. Let 'em screw up now and then.

Four-Color Options

The four color parameters for tone get you and your players on the same page about the nature of the universe. But it never hurts to have the rules themselves model those parameters a little more closely. Here are some tweaks that can help your game conform to the agreed-upon tone.

Red: I Slept Through History Class

Keeping historical inertia intact through the pre-game history is easy enough. Once the PCs start running around blowing shit up (or curing AIDS, or inventing room-temperature superconductors) it can be much harder to keep the train along the historical inevitability track.

That is, in many cases, fine. Your guys are the main characters, right? If anyone's going to derail that engine, it should be them. They want to revolutionize power production with clean fusion, sending shockwaves through the entrenched global fossil fuel economy? Honestly, that sounds like an awesome story to me. It's not like there aren't plenty of powerful and ruthless people who'd see that as some uppity whippersnapper trying to make hamburgers out of their cash cow.

But if you'd prefer to avoid the headaches of creating a realistic alternative global current-events schema, there are some ways to keep it real (as they say). The thing to understand is that no matter how fast and powerful Mega-Woman is, she's only one person. She gets tired, she makes mistakes, she can only be in one place at a time. No matter how much she can accomplish in that spot, there's always lots going on in lots of spots, everywhere. History doesn't turn on a dime, it oozes along in response to a million aggregate factors.

No, the stability threatening powers that bleach the red out of your game are the very things that let characters influence or predict that legion of influences. The main offenders? Hypercommand, hyperbrains and precognition.

Precognition is already fairly limited. As long as you don't expand its purview beyond "GM gives you a free ride on the Clue Bus now and again" there's no reason that PC seers can't accrue minor advantages without seeing far enough to get global insight. Plus, there's always the fun of being the Cassandra whose warnings are ignored, or the Oedipus who doesn't understand the prophecy until it's way too late. If you're into that sort of thing. Many players aren't. They want to see the future to avoid bad stuff, and frankly that's not out of line. But personal precognition should satisfy the safety fans. Players who want more than that can make do with a gentle "no".

Hyperbrains, though. Logically, someone smarter than you should be able to think of things you'd overlook. Someone who's smarter than anyone has ever been in real history? Should be able to think of things you can't even imagine.

See the problem here? Even assuming that history is chaotic and highly contingent, a Hyperbrain should be able to push technology ahead a few decades singlehandedly, or figure out the stock market like a grad student hitting *See Spot Run*. Once he's a billionaire, probably from investing in his own biotech start-up and then curing cancer or obesity, he can become one of those pressures on the course of human events, throwing millions at any senator, humanitarian initiative or minor brush war that his uncanny analysis tells him is important. This is very cool if your game is going to be about the PCs shaking the world, but if you want your world unshaken, it's going to be hard for you to explain the barriers to it. Plus, it's very frustrating for a player to gave up heat vision to be smarter than everyone else, and then have nothing to show for it because anything besides building power armor derails the GM's plot.

Ditto hypercommand. If you think the hyperbrain can get rich quick, imagine a group of venture capitalists excitedly exclaiming, "Cotton balls!"

I know! I never understood how exciting they were until he explained it to me. This is going to be BIG. Did he tell you about the marketing he's planning? Twenty-city tour... he's going to make these things for pennies and sell them for dollars. We're all going to be rich!" That's fairly benign, when you consider what happens when Mr. Command 10 stands up in front of the stadium before his rock concert and says, "You know, it's real important for you all to register Republican and vote in the primary."

There are scalable responses to these issues, and banning them outright (either in the setting or just for PCs) is the farthest extremity of them. Short of that, you can cap them ("Yeah, you can have hyper-command, but only up to 7d in it") or increase the cost. Once the price of genius is that Brains past 5 costs 20/40/80 instead of 5/10/20, the urge to meddle with the U.N. (or the underlying laws of physics) usually plummets.

Gold: Personality Mechanics

High-Gold games are supposed to feature iconic characters—unchanging and steady and (in a good way) predictable. Reliable. Bad guys you can count on to stay defiant and not find Jesus in prison. Good guys who won't bend under pressure. Pretty-good guys who will bend under pressure, but always feel awful about it afterwards.

High Gold is good for GMs who have authority over events and GMC personalities. But the PCs are, as always, exceptional. Maybe that's okay. A game where everyone else is stubborn and the PCs are permitted to change when it's sensible has a lot of appeal. It goes a long way towards explaining why the story is focussed on these people, for one thing.

But even if your players agree to play heavily golden characters before the dice hit the mat, they may begin to waver in the heat of actual play. If remaining true to their concept is going to cost them, that's a disinclination. Or, just as likely, your player

doesn't have a completely firm and developed idea of his character's "true self".

Personality mechanics can help with both these problems, and there are a couple ways to use them, depending on just how much of a Gold bug you want to be.

Every approach starts with the personality, drawn in broad strokes with three questions.

- 1) What is your character at her/his best?
- 2) What is your character at his/her worst?
- 3) How does the character present him- or herself to others?

Question #1 is the character as hero. Maybe he's compassionate, even to people he doesn't care for, even when it costs him or puts him in danger. Maybe he's brave and never submits to fear, no matter what the odds. Could be she's sensible and adaptable, available to find the safe middle route between stifling rigor and feckless impulsiveness.

Question #2 is just the opposite, it's his flaw. What does she not want her mom to know about? Is she indecisive and easily led by her friends? Is he a bully? Foolishly overconfident in his powers and arrogant to boot? The flaw question can reveal something the character doesn't know about herself, or doesn't consider a problem. Then again, it can be something he understands and is ashamed of, but just can't seem to cure.

Question #3 is perhaps the subtlest. It deals not with how the character is, but how he wishes to be seen. It reveals her persona. If you're running a game of superheroes (as opposed to normal folks with superpowers) each character might well have two answers to this—one for his mild-mannered daytime life doing marketing for a dental collective, and one for the swaggering, night-stalking crime fighter Mancat.

What you do with these three factors lies along two axes. One is, do you want to reward act-

ing in character (high Gold) or acting against it (low Gold)? It's really a choice between stasis and change. The other axis asks, how intense should the reward and punishment be?

The intensity of the influence determines what kind of advantages (or disadvantages) accrue from bringing personality aspects into play. If the influence is not very intense, the reward/punishment schedule simply takes the form of dice added or subtracted. The minor penalty is -1d, the medium is -2d and the major penalty is -3d. Similarly, the minor advantage is +1d, the medium is +2d and the major is +3d.

If the impact is extremely intense, the penalties and bonuses grow accordingly. A minor penalty at this intensity is still -1d. The medium penalty is now -3d. The major penalty? The character just can't do it. She can't bring herself to violate everything that defines her, nope, no way, that action is verboten. This goes against the idea that the player is always in control of the character, but in this case the player decided which three things would completely strait-jacket the character, so if you get hoist on your own petard there's no one to blame but yourself.

The advantages of intense emotion are pretty sweet. The minor advantage is: You can add a die to your pool, or offset a die's worth of penalty. The medium is either ignoring two dice of penalties, or adding a Hard Die to your pool. The big advantage is buying off three dice worth of penalties, or adding a Wiggle Die to your pool.

Modifier	Less Intense	Very Intense
Minor Penalty	-1d	-1d
Medium Penalty	-2d	-3d
Big Penalty	-3d	Just can't do it.
Minor Bonus	+1d	+1d or offset at -1d penalty
Medium Bonus	+2d	+1hd or offset a -2d penalty
Big Bonus	+3d	+1wd or offset a -3d penalty

If change is desirable, the character gets a bonus to every roll when two of his factors are in conflict. If a character's flaw is that he's a secret bully, but his persona is that of a toe-the-line law enforcer, what happens when he's tempted to beat information out of a suspect? Because he's conflicted, wanting to do bad but not look bad, he gets the medium power up. He gets this regardless of which choice he makes. The player is being rewarded for putting the character in an uncomfortable position. Now, if all three elements are contending, he gets the big boost. So, suppose our square-jawed sadist's heroic side is self-sacrifice. If he finds out that beating up this crook is going to lead to vicious reprisals later on, he's got the hat trick and adds the highest level of advantage to his actions—even if he decides not to beat the guy. (Though most likely he wouldn't add the WD to anything, if he opts not to act.)

Factors in Play	Change is Good	Stability is Good
Acting With One Factor	no effect	minor bonus
Acting With One, Against One	medium bonus	no effect
Acting With One, Against Two	big bonus	minor penalty
Acting With Two	no effect	medium bonus
Acting With Two, Against One	big bonus	minor bonus
Acting Against Two	no effect	medium penalty
Acting With Three	no effect	big bonus
Acting Against Three	no effect	big penalty

In this setup, characters never get penalized by their character factors, nor do they ever take minor bonuses. It's a deep spur to action or it's nothing. Players should choose factors they're going to enjoy going for and going against.

If stability is desirable, a character who's acting in accordance with one element gets the small bonus to the relevant pool. If she acts in accordance with two at the same time, she gets the medium bonus. If he takes an action that appeals to his better nature and his vices and how he wants everyone to see him—he's highly motivated. He gets the big bonus. But there's a catch: Every time the dimensions of his personality are in conflict, they don't spur him on. They put him in stalemate.

In other words, every factor that gets played to pushes the advantage up a level. But every factor denied pushes the advantage down a level. Act against one dimension of character, get the little disadvantage. Act against two, get the medium penalty. Act against all three and you get a maximum penalty.

So in the by-the-book bully example, he gets no bonus, no matter what he does, because his emotions are going north and south. If he's against one and for two, he only gets a small advantage, because the factor that would push him to medium is bumped back down by the factor that would give him a little penalty.

Blue: The 'Woohoo' Issue

The Blue axis is hard to plan for, by definition. High blue settings have everything plus the kitchen sink, and that kitchen sink is probably a transformed Egyptian soul-stealer in disguise. There's callous disregard for reasonable, real-world laws of physics: The guiding principle is, "Dude, wouldn't it be cool if _____? Yeah it would! Woohoo!"

This unbridled enthusiasm is fun. It has a tendency to crank things away from the somber side of black, though that's not graven in stone. (I suppose you could do a really creepy high-Blue, low-Black

setting that's a nihilistic wonderland of absurd and pointless glitz, equally magnificent and cruel.) But the problem with a steady diet of woohoo is that it stops being special.

Woohoo is like whipped cream. It's delicious, but better on top of something else. You wouldn't want to sit down and eat a big plate of it, and you wouldn't want it for every meal. To keep the woohoo intriguing, make sure to leaven it with some of the central and iconic issues that everyone deals with: Anxiety, petty resentment, self-doubt and envy and unwise infatuation. Paying some attention to the stuff of real life puts the fantastic elements in perspective, and at the same time anchors them. In other words, Superman needs Lois Lane.

Sometimes the problems the characters face are mundane, even in the deepest of blue settings. Trying to solve emotional problems with woohoo methods can be handled as comedy, or tragedy. If you're in love and try to make him love you back with a potion instead of the old-fashioned way, it can be a laughable mistake (in high black) or a grotesque emotional violation (in low black).

Woohoo problems, on the other hand, can be solved with either mundane or outrageous approaches, and both have their satisfactions. There's something inherently appealing about having a sinister forest of Unseelie pop up in Maine overnight and sending in the Marines to mow them down with SAWs. On the other hand, it's also a fun game to see the PCs tackle a fairy-tale scenario on its home turf and try to send the Unseelie away by beating them in a riddle contest or through some other trick.

This raises the issue of "negating." "No, if you get into a fiddling contest with the Evil Elf Queen, you're going to crash and burn. Only flamethrowers can save you!" shouldn't be only the GM's decision to make. If they're trying with violence, it's because they want or expect a violent game. Wanting big

fight scenes is hardly out of line for *Wild Talents*, though it's a good idea to make sure they're seeking out brawls and not merely taking the path of least resistance. Give them the game that makes them happy, even if you weren't expecting it. The unexpected is, of course, a hallmark of the big Blue *woohoo*.

Black: 'Destroy Him, My Punk-Rock Homeless Minions!'

In a low-Black game, violence is murky and ambiguous and important—like it's supposed to be in real life. In a medium-Black setting, what keeps characters up at night aren't the obvious “him or me” decisions, but the ones that are less clean cut. “Maybe he was bluffing and wouldn't have detonated it, but I couldn't take the chance” or “we all thought it was the drug-resistant strain and that the only choice was to take down his plane or let it land and start a pandemic.” That sort of thing.

High Black, on the other hand, is all clean cut. The only people losing sleep are the ones who did something wrong, because everyone knows what wrong is. Violence is always chosen in the deep black, but that doesn't mean it's not the right choice. Some games with high-def ethical clarity are exceptionally violent, because they're premised on “It's okay to kill them, they chose to be Nazis.” (Or to follow the Church of Evil Me. Or because the cannibal ape-men of the hollow Earth are inherently wicked due to the demonic ichor fused into their blood by an ancient Atlantean scientist).

Then again maybe you just want your heroes swarmed by zombies, giant ants, or leathery subhumans made of discarded embryos spliced with dinosaur DNA. In all these cases, you need to make heavy use of the Minion rules.

And that's fine. But sometimes your minions aren't just a batch of drones, bumbling along with their arms outstretched and vacant expressions.



TODD '07

Sometimes they've got an edge that goes beyond a high-caliber rifle or a catchy slogan.

The easiest way to simulate something that peppers them up, like high-tech armor or lightning rings or an enchantment that gives them totemic leopard powers, is to simply dump some appropriate dice on top of their normal pool, like cherries and chopped nuts on a sundae. Here's some guidelines.

Minor Advantage: This is stuff in the well-equipped normal range—not just firepower, but night-vision goggles and ballistic cloth vests and synchronous communications gear. Add a HD to their pool.

Significant Advantage: Here we're touching on techno-thriller stuff—cutting-edge stealth gear, thermal imaging rigs the size of carrots that let them see through walls, debilitating non-lethal pain rays and the like. Add a WD to their pool.

Major Advantage: Here we're talking about mooks amped beyond the boundaries of normal

science. They've each got an implant that jolts their brain's pleasure center with each kill, along with guns that shoot around corners and a drug regimen that lets them continue to run on the stumps after their legs are shot off. Add 2hd.

Though phrased in technological terms, the same vague system works for enchantment enhancement as well. Good luck charms that they truly, deeply, honestly believe in with total faith and commitment even though they're made in China out of reprocessed bottle caps? Add a Hard Die. Good luck charms that work? Take a Wiggle Die. Good luck charms that get you laid and stop bullets? Two Hard Dice.

Tinkering around with the rules for some Miracles can work pretty easily too. Anything that changes the effect of a set without altering the size or composition of the set or pool should work just as well on a minion clump as on an individual, though your mileage may vary.

Appendix D: Adventures, Scenes and Challenges

When you're preparing to run a *Wild Talents* game, at the broadest level you'll build an *adventure*—the big picture, the overall course of events, the broad situation that the players face. An adventure is like a movie, a graphic novel, or an episode of a TV series.

An adventure is built in a number of *scenes*—the specific situations where the characters address the broad situation and interact with NPCs.

Each scene includes one or more *challenges*, specific, important things that the characters have to accomplish.

Build the game from the top down: The adventure, then the scenes that constitute the adventure, then the challenges that constitute each scene.

Building an Adventure

Use the player characters' motivations! Every Passion and Loyalty is a possible ingredient for an adventure that will be compelling to that player. When you're building the adventure, include some way that the situation challenges at least one Passion or Loyalty from each player character.

Or to look at it another way, you can start with a Passion or Loyalty from character and think up ways to put them at risk. What threatens that Passion or Loyalty? Who's behind that threat? What does the character have to do to save it from the threat?

Even better, come up with ways for their Passions and Loyalties to challenge each other! Find ways that they conflict and overlap. Find a way for one character's Passion to conflict with another character's Loyalty; or for one's Passion to conflict with another's Passion, or one Loyalty with another Loyalty. Set it up so one character's motivation will necessarily win and another's will lose, unless the players can find a way out of the trouble.

Put those ingredients together—some may be the main plot, others may be subplots, but all should be involved—and you have the overall situation that the characters face. The adventure.

Building a Scene

Scenes are the building blocks of adventures. Each scene is a location and situation that features one or more of the player characters, along with non-player characters and whatever other challenges the players face.

That's key—a scene is all about challenges! If the players don't face a challenge, there's nothing compelling about the situation and there's no need to play it out in a scene. Just sum it up with a moment of exposition and move on to the next challenge.

So, how do you decide what the scenes in an adventure will look like? First, figure out what the key objectives are going to be in the adventure. What specific circumstances are hammering on the players' Passions and Loyalties? What steps will they need to take to resolve those circumstances? Each of those steps needs a scene, and maybe more than one.

Adapt the scenes to your players' goals and interests. If your players are hungry for superpowered action, throw in a scene that can easily deteriorate into a fight. If the players are more interested in tense negotiations, make sure the NPCs are the scheming, talking sorts more than the eyebeaming, punching sorts. If the players want to sneak around and outfox their enemies, give them a chance to use Stealth and Scrutiny.

It's almost always a good idea to involve all the players in a scene, but if you need to play a scene

with only some of the players, that's fine. Just be aware that you're leaving out everyone else. Keep that scene short and punchy, get to its challenges right away and hit the players with the consequences for however they decide to face them. Then move on to a scene where you can bring the other players into the action.

Building a Challenge

Each scene is built with challenges, the specific things that the player characters need to achieve. Sometimes, building a good challenge is easier said than done! *Wild Talents* is a superhero game, and superhero games can be hard to predict. If you're plotting out a big detective mystery where the players have to use careful interrogations, logic and their wits figure out whodunnit, some player is bound to show up with a few dice in Telepathy or a power called "See Exactly What Happened at This Location the Night of December 4th."

To create good *Wild Talents* challenges, you have to be flexible. Adapt to the characters' powers and plan for contingencies—have another challenge in mind if they blow through the first one too easily—but don't be too attached to your plans. Be ready to improvise. Get familiar with the characters' Skills and powers and build your challenges accordingly, balancing challenges where their Skills and powers will shine with challenges where their Skills will be much less effective and they'll have to think creatively.

Flexibility is doubly important in combat. More than many superhero games, *Wild Talents* allows players to play for keeps. Some characters have absolute powers like "Instant Death" (Hard Dice in Harm, page 147) and "Invulnerability" (page 150). If you want to run a suspenseful action scene, it's crucial to know what the player characters can do and to plan accordingly.

If one of them is totally invulnerable to physical harm, to add suspense you need to hit them

where they *can* be hurt, whether that's some kind of psychic mind control or simply going after their Willpower by attacking the characters to whom Captain Invulnerable has Loyalty.

If a character has an unstoppable attack power, a suspenseful combat scene shouldn't hinge on whether or not an attack will work—you already know it will! Instead the scene needs to draw its suspense from making the character choose *when* to attack, or *whom* to attack, or *whether* to attack at all. If that decision can be keyed into one of the character's Passions, all the better.

It's also important to challenge the players without overwhelming them. Study the characters' defenses and weaknesses, and figure out ahead of time how you can hit them and make them nervous without completely destroying them. You want suspense, not instant defeat. If they do face instant defeat, it should serve as a warning that they need to come up with some other way to approach that enemy in the rematch.

Finally, a stand-up brawl is fun once in a while, but a good adventure needs more than that. Confront the players with different kinds of conflicts: Pursuit of their enemies; escape from their enemies; nonviolent conflict with people who are completely on their side but who completely disagree with them; potentially violent conflict with escalating consequences for choosing to engage in violence. Indulge in variety.

Not Whether, But Why

Always remember, in *Wild Talents* the characters can do the impossible. That's why they have superpowers! Ultimately the point of a *Wild Talents* game is not to discover what the characters are *able* to do. The point is to see what they *choose* to do, their reasons for doing it, and the consequences of that choice. Every adventure should put at risk the characters' Loyalties and Passions—the people and things that they love most.

Wild Talents Reference

Character Costs

Characteristic	Cost
Stat	5 per die
Hyperstat	4 per die
Skill	2 per die
Hyperskill	1 per die
Base Will	3 per point
Willpower	1 per point
Superpower Quality	2 per die

Stats and Skills

Add Stat + Skill to determine your dice pool.

Body

Athletics
Block
Brawling
Endurance
Melee Weapon (Type)

Coordination

Dodge
Driving (Type)
Ranged Weapon (Type)
Stealth

Sense

Empathy
Scrutiny
Perception

Mind

First Aid
Knowledge (Type)
Language (Type)
Medicine
Navigation
Research
Security Systems
Streetwise
Survival
Tactics

Charm

Lie
Performance (Type)
Persuasion

Command

Interrogation
Intimidation
Leadership
Stability

Base Will

Base Will = Charm + Command.

Spending Willpower

Gift: Donate WP to an ally.

Improvement: Improve a Stat, Skill or superpower, during a crisis.

Inspiration: Pay 1 WP to gain a bonus die

Intuition: Add 1d to Sense for the declaration phase only.

Resist Influence: Pay 1 WP to reduce the width of an effect on you by 1.

Shake It Off: Pay 1 WP for −1 Shock damage, or 2 WP for −1 Killing.

Stay Alive: One round for 1 WP.

Wake Up: Pay 1 WP to gain an Endurance roll to regain consciousness.

Gaining Willpower

Rest: Gain 1 WP per night up to Base Will.

Heroism: Gain 1 WP for voluntarily risking yourself to protect another.

Performance: Gain 1 WP for spectacular action.

Luck: Gain 1 WP for rolling a set at height 10 (Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice don't count).

Victory: If you defeat a superhuman, gain his or her Base Will in WP.

Loyalty: Gain WP by supporting, serving and protecting the subject of your loyalty, and getting recognition and other affirmation for it.

Passion: Gain WP by fulfilling your personal passion in some way.

Zero Willpower

Each power's Hard Dice and Wiggle Dice become normal dice; all power dice pools are halved. Any further Willpower loss comes from Base Will instead.

Wild Talents Reference

Superpower Qualities and Costs

Attacks (2): Inflicts width in Shock and Killing.

Extra Attacks levels (1 each):

Each adds +1 Shock and Killing.

Defends (2): Allows a defense roll to "gobble" attack dice.

Extra Defends levels (1 each):

Each adds +1 "gobble die."

Useful (2): Does . . . something else.

Every Useful quality is different.

Extra Useful levels (1 each):

Each offsets one penalty die.

Extras

Area	+1
Augment	+4
Booster	+1
Burn	+2
Controlled Effect	+1
Daze	+1
Deadly	+1 or +2
Disintegrate	+2
Duration	+2
Electrocuting	+1
Endless	+3
Engulf	+2
Go First	+1
Hardened Defense	+2
High Capacity (Type)	+1
Interference	+3
Native Power	+1
No Physics	+1
No Upward Limit	+2
Non-Physical	+2
On Sight	+1
Penetration	+1
Permanent	+4
Power Capacity (Type)	+1 or +2
Radius	+2
Speeding Bullet	+2
Spray	+1

Subtle

+1

Traumatic

+1

Variable Effect

+4

Flaws

Always On

-1

Armored Defense

-2

Attached

-1 or -2

Automatic

-1

Backfires

-2

Base Will Cost

-4

Delayed Effect

-2

Depleted

-1

Direct Feed

-2

Exhausted

-3

Focus

-1

Accessible

-1

Adaptation

-2

Booby-Trapped

+1

Bulky

-1

Crew

-1

Delicate

-1

Durable

+1

Environment-Bound

-1

Friends Only

+2

Immutable

-1

Indestructible

+2

Irreplaceable

-2

Manufacturable

+2

Operational Skill

+0

Secret

+1

Unwieldy

-1 or -2

Fragile

-1

Full Power Only

-1

Go Last

-1

Horrificing

-1

If/Then

-1

Limited Damage

-1

Limited Width

-1

Locational

-1

Loopy

-1

Mental Strain

-2

No Physical Change

-1

Obvious

-1

One Use

-4

Reduced Capacities

-1

Scattered Damage

-1

Self Only

-3

Slow

-2

Touch Only

-2

Uncontrollable

-2

Willpower Bid

-1

Willpower Cost

-2

Willpower Investment

-1

Wild Talents Dice

Normal Dice (d): Roll no more than 10d. Look for sets of matching dice. Dice penalties remove normal dice after Hard Dice.

Hard Dice (hd): Set each hd to "10" before rolling the rest.

Dice penalties remove Hard Dice first.

Wiggle Dice (wd): Set each wd to any value you want after rolling the rest. Dice penalties remove Wiggle Dice last.

Bonus Dice: Add +1d or +2d before rolling.

Penalty Dice: Each removes one die from your dice pool: Hard Dice, then normal dice, then Wiggle Dice.

Gobble Dice: Each removes one die from an opposing set of equal or lesser height and width.

Loose Dice: Dice that don't match any others in the roll.

Wild Talents Reference

Miracle Cafeteria

Aces (A D U; 12 per die)

Add your dice to some other action, at a cost of 1/2/4 WP per die thrown.

Alternate Forms (A D U; 18 per die)

Change your shape and "transfer" dice from Alternate Forms to some other power appropriate to the new shape.

Bind (U; 4 per die)

Immobilize a target or object at a distance.

Block (D; 2 per die)

Defend against an attack.

Containment (D U; 14 per die)

Hold things in place at a distance.

Control (Type) (A D U; 6 per die)

Manipulate some energy or substance. If you can manipulate something with mass, Control has no range unless you take the Power Capacity (Range) Extra.

Cosmic Power (A D U; 21 per die)

Manifest any power you wish by "transferring" dice from Cosmic Power to the new power.

Create (Type) (A D U; 6 per die)

Create some substance or energy out of thin air.

Custom Hit Locations (U; 2 per die)

Rearrange your hit locations and wound boxes.

Dead Ringer (U; 7 per die)

Change your appearance to impersonate anyone or anything of about the same size.

Duplicates (D U U; 12 per die)

Create duplicates of yourself to perform multiple actions and augment your actions.

Elasticity (U; 2 per die)

Stretch and contort your body.

Extra Tough (U; 5 per die)

Gain width in additional wound boxes on each hit location.

Flight (D U; 4 per die)

You can fly!

Gadgeteering (A D U U; 16 per die)

Create gadgets that emulate other powers by "transferring" Gadgeteering dice into the new powers.

Ghost (D U; 6 per die)

Manifest a semi-substantial clone that can wander while your own body sleeps.

Harm (A; 2 per die)

Attack for width in Shock and Killing damage.

Healing (U+1; 1 per die)

Heal width in Shock and Killing damage.

Heavy Armor (D; 6 per die)

Each die removes one die of equal or lesser height from each attack against you.

Illusions (A D U; 6 per die)

Make the target see, hear, feel or smell anything you want.

Immunity (Type) (U; 3 per die)

You are immune to some otherwise dangerous substance or environment.

Insubstantiality (A D U+1; 6 per die)

You can become completely immaterial.

Invisibility (D U; 5 per die)

Turn invisible.

Invulnerability (D D U; 20 per die)

Gain immunity to dangerous environments and armor that resists weapon damage and penetration.

Jinx (A D U; 8 per die)

Each die removes one die of equal or lesser height from an opponent's dice pool, at a cost of 1/2/4 WP per Jinx die.

Light Armor (D; 3 per die)

Gain width in LAR.

Mind Control (U; 2 per die)

Control the target's behavior.

Minions (U; 4 per die)

Summon a group of minions.

Multiple Actions (U; 2 per die)

Gain bonus dice with multiple actions.

Nullify (Type) (U; 4 per die)

Nullify one Archetype Source, at a cost of 1/2/4 Willpower per die thrown.

Perceive (Type) (U; 2 per die)

Sense some stimulus outside normal human awareness.

Power Mimic (A D U; 15 per die)

Touch a target to copy his or her powers by "transferring" Power Mimic dice into the copied powers.

Precognition (U; 2 per die)

Get answers to questions about the future, at a cost of 1/2/4 WP per die.

Psychic Artifacts (A D U; 18 per die)

Create immaterial objects that can emulate other powers by "transferring" Psychic Artifacts dice into the new powers.

Puppet (U; 4 per die)

Take over a target's mind.

Regeneration (U; 5 per die)

Heal width in Shock and Killing on each of your own hit locations each round.

Sidekick (D U; 6 per die)

Manifest an entity that acts on its own.

Size Shift (D U; 5 per die)

Increase or decrease your size.

Telekinesis (A D U; 10 per die)

Move objects with your mind.

Telepathy (A D U; 8 per die)

Read minds.

Teleportation (A D U; 6 per die)

Move instantly from one place to another.

Time Fugue (D U; 11 per die)

Freeze time for a single target, removing dice from all the target's actions.

Transform (Type) (U; 4 per die)

Either change a particular substance to anything else, or transform anything to a particular substance.

Unconventional Move (U; 2 per die)

Move in a way that ordinary humans can't.

Vicious (A+1; 6 per die)

Add damage to any attack.

Willpower Battery (U; 2 per die)

Store Willpower to fuel powers.

WILD TALENTS

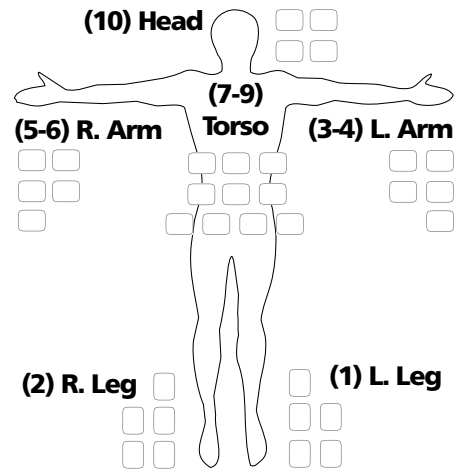
Name/Aliases: _____

Description: _____

Occupation: _____

Loyalty: _____

Passion: _____



Archetype: _____

Intrinsics: _____

Cost: _____

Sources: _____

Permissions: _____

Body	Coordination	Sense
Athletics _____ ()	Dodge _____ ()	Empathy _____ ()
Block _____ ()	Driving _____ ()	Perception _____ ()
Brawling _____ ()	Lockpicking _____ ()	Scrutiny _____ ()
Endurance _____ ()	Stealth _____ ()	
Weapon _____ ()	Weapon _____ ()	
Weapon _____ ()	Weapon _____ ()	

Mind	Charm	Command
First Aid _____ ()	Lie _____ ()	Interrogation _____ ()
Medicine _____ ()	Perform _____ ()	Intimidation _____ ()
Navigation _____ ()	Persuasion _____ ()	Leadership _____ ()
Research _____ ()		Stability _____ ()
Security Systems _____ ()		
Streetwise _____ ()		
Survival _____ ()		
Tactics _____ ()		
_____ ()		
_____ ()		
_____ ()		

Base Will _____ **Point Total** _____

Willpower _____ **Experience Points** _____

Disadvantages, Equipment and Other Notes: _____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Power Description and Dice:

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Total Cost per Die: _____

Total Cost: _____

Power Description and Dice:

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Total Cost per Die: _____

Total Cost: _____

Power Description and Dice:

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

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Total Cost per Die: _____

Total Cost: _____

Power Description and Dice:

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

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Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Quality, Extras, Flaws and Cost: _____

Total Cost per Die: _____

Total Cost: _____

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SUPERHERO ROLEPLAYING IN A WORLD GONE MAD

Wild Talents is a roleplaying game built for suspenseful superpowered action. It features tremendously flexible and customizable rules for creating characters and powers based on the fan-favorite One-Roll Engine. Made famous in such acclaimed games as *Godlike*, *Reign*, and *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, the One-Roll Engine combines speed, detail, and danger. This is a superhero game that plays for keeps.

Wild Talents includes a deep alternate history of a world shaped by superpowered "Talents" since their first appearance in World War II, and a fascinating system for creating superheroic histories all your own.

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